

THE OLD QB

THE MIND GAME OF AARON RODGERS

BY GREG BISHOP

P. 32

Sports Illustrated

SI.COM

SEPTEMBER 21, 2015

@SINOW

THE NEW QB

MARCUS MARIOTA AND HIS HISTORIC OPENING STATEMENT

BY GREG A. BEDARD / P. 42

THE EX-QB

BRAXTON MILLER AND HIS ELECTRIFYING TRANSITION

BY PETE THAMEL / P. 50





zoom-zoom

DO YOU REMEMBER YOUR FIRST DRIVE?

IT WAS FINALLY JUST YOU AND THE OPEN ROAD. NO PARENTS. NO
INSTRUCTORS. YOU COULD DRIVE TO SCHOOL, TO THE BEACH, TO THE
NEXT STATE. IT DIDN'T MATTER WHERE YOU WENT. IF IT HAD A ROAD,
YOU COULD DRIVE THERE. THERE WAS A NEWFOUND SENSE OF FREEDOM
AND JOY YOU FELT BEHIND THE WHEEL. THAT FEELING IS SOMETHING
WE PUT IN EVERY MAZDA WE MAKE. SO NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES
YOU RENEW YOUR LICENSE, THOSE FEELINGS NEVER HAVE TO FADE.



DRIVING MATTERS™





ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Your body's most complex structure is your face. At LensCrafters, our custom fit technology allows us to craft glasses that fit your eyes and face perfectly.

LENSCRAFTERS®



LINEUP

9.21.15

2015 | VOLUME 123 | NO. 11

TENNIS 26 U.S. OPEN

Novak Djokovic won his 10th major, while Serena Williams finished just short of a Slam
By L. Jon Wertheim

Photograph by Erick W. Rasco
For Sports Illustrated

+ ROGER, OUT
After playing six matches of nearly flawless tennis in Flushing, Roger Federer fell to Djokovic in the men's finals.

Features

NFL WEEK 1

32 Aaron Rodgers

The many sides of the NFL's best quarterback
By Greg Bishop

42 The New QBs

Jameis Winston was picked No. 1—but it was Marcus Mariota who had a historic pro debut
By Greg A. Bedard

- ROOKIE RUNNING BACKS
- RETHINKING LEFT TACKLE

50 Braxton Miller

Switching to H-back wasn't easy for the former QB, but it may have helped his draft stock
By Pete Thamel

56 Dwight Gooden

A dream season in '85 turned out to be the beginning of the end for the Mets phenom
By Tom Verducci

Departments

- 4 **SI Digital**
- 6 **Leading Off**
- 12 **Inbox**
- 14 **Scorecard**
- 20 **Faces in the Crowd**
- 22 **Just My Type**
Dan Patrick:
Andrew Luck rates himself as an actor
- 64 **Point After**
Michael Rosenberg:
Fans rationalize like champs

SI has regional covers this week:
John W. McDonough for Sports Illustrated (Rodgers); Gary Bogdon for Sports Illustrated (Mariota)

Sports Illustrated

SI.COM

FOR SEPT. 21, 2015



One Week In

The problem with Week 1 in the NFL: When it's over, you're either making plans for the Super Bowl [my team is undefeated!] or calling it a lost season [my team is winless!]. Check out SI.com/nfl for complete analysis of opening week—and, depending on whom you root for, a little useful perspective. Get the latest injury report, breakdowns of the top performers [**Carson Palmer**-3 and **Tyrod Taylor**-5] and the week's biggest busts [please, give Jameis Winston a break]. Plus, Chris Burke has his power rankings and Doug Farrar's *MythBusters* breaks down why it is possible to cover **Gronk** [87].

SI.COM'S TOP STORIES

1 The Art of Avoiding INTs

How a lack of turnovers has helped build Aaron Rodgers into the most efficient quarterback



2 My Education as a Head Coach

For a roundup of last week's most popular stories on SI.com—including an exclusive with Houston football coach **Tom Herman**—go to SI.com/topstories

3 108-year-old fan makes history

Evelyn Jones threw out the first pitch at a Mariners game, walking an unlikely path to MLB history

4 Nordic Track

Iceland's place in Euro 2016 is a result of calculated development and growth

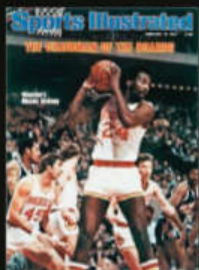
5 Patriots Games

Suspensions about New England coach Bill Belichick's regime persist among opponents

SI Digital Bonus

Bounding into Prominence

From the SI Vault
Feb. 19, 1979



Moses Malone jumped from high school to the pros, where he has become the game's top rebounder

By Frank Deford

To read this and other stories from the *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* archive, go to SI.com/vault



SI PRO-FILES



As successful as many athletes are in their sports, some go on to find even more success after they retire. To learn about former NFL quarterbacks **Damon Huard** (left, in white) and **Dan Marino** and their wine enterprise, as well as other sports figures turned business leaders, go to SI.com/Pro-Files, a series from the editors of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* and *FORTUNE*.



The revolution will not only be
TELEVISED
The revolution will be
MOBILIZED

With DIRECTV & AT&T, you can get your TV from home – on the go.

Introducing the All in One Plan. Connect 4 TVs and 4 Smartphones for \$200/mo.* for 12 months.

*Price after \$10/mo. combined bill discount. Requires 24 mo. TV agreement. **Price increase after 1st year. Add'l fees apply. HBO subscription sold separately.



Offer ends 11/14/15. New residential DIRECTV customers only (equipment lease required). Credit approval required. Pro-rated ETF fee (up to \$480) and Equipment Non-Return fees apply for TV.

\$200 Offer:** Price for **DIRECTV SELECT All Included TV** package and **Mobile Share Value 15GB** wireless service plan with 4 smartphone lines. Includes Advanced Receiver Service Fee and lease of Whole Home DVR and up to 3 add'l receivers. After 12 mos, then prevailing rate for TV package applies (currently \$85/mo.) unless cancelled or changed by customer before the end of the promotional period. Non-activation charge of \$150 per receiver may apply. Taxes not included. Programming, pricing, terms and conditions subject to change at any time. **Mobile Share Value 15GB plan:** \$100/mo. plan charge for 15GB of data & \$15/mo. access charge per smartphone on no annual svc agmt (AT&T Next, BYOD, full price or month-to-month). Excludes phones on 2-yr agmts. **Data overage charges (\$15/1GB)** apply. Phone purchase costs add'l. **Gen. Wireless Svc Terms: Subject to Wireless Customer Agmt.** Activ./upgrade & other fees and a deposit may apply per line. **Other Monthly Charges/Line:** include taxes & federal/state universal svc charges, Reg. Cost Recovery Charge (up to \$1.25), gross receipts surcharge, Admin. Fee & other gov't assessments which are not gov't req'd charges. Coverage & svc not avail. everywhere. Visit att.com/mobilesharevalue for details. *24 MONTH TV AGREEMENT:** You must maintain a base TV package of \$29.99/mo. or above or international service bundle. Subject to Equipment Lease Agreement and DIRECTV Customer Agreement. \$19.95 Handling & Delivery fee may apply. Applicable use tax adjustment may apply on the retail value of the installation. Visit directv.com/legal or call 1-800-DIRECTV for details. **\$10 Combined Bill Discount:** For customers who combine eligible TV and postpaid consumer wireless services on a single AT&T bill. Not valid in U.S. Virgin Islands or Puerto Rico. Other exclusions apply. Combined billing & discount may take effect 1-2 bill cycles. **Offer ends 11/14/15.** Access to content on the go requires qualifying mobile device, TV plan, directv.com account login and data connection. Not all channels available. Content varies by device, TV plan and viewing location. Data charges may apply. HBO® and related channels and service marks are the property of Home Box Office, Inc. Game of Thrones® on HBO® on DIRECTV Everywhere. ©2015 AT&T Intellectual Property. DIRECTV is a registered trademark of DIRECTV, LLC. AT&T, the AT&T logo and all other AT&T marks contained herein are trademarks of AT&T Intellectual Property and/or AT&T affiliated companies. All other trademarks and service marks are the property of their respective owners.



Leading Off

+

1
of
3

Papi Knock

■ So much for resting his sore right leg. Given the option of taking last Saturday off, David Ortiz told interim manager Torey Lovullo to put him in the Red Sox lineup—and proceeded to hit two home runs, including the 500th of his career. After launching a three-run shot in the first inning in Tampa, Ortiz sent a Matt Moore curveball 432 feet into the seats in right center in the fifth, joining Albert Pujols as the only players to hit Nos. 499 and 500 in the same game. The Red Sox streamed out of the dugout and Ortiz embraced second baseman Dustin Pedroia (*inset*), his teammate for 10 of the 13 seasons Big Papi has spent in Boston.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
CHRIS O'MEARA
AP







Leading
Off

+

2
of
3

Throw Down, Moses

■ Talk about setting the tone. In Game 1 of the 1983 NBA Finals, Moses Malone of the 76ers dropped 27 points on the Lakers and Hall of Fame center Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (*far right*). Malone, who passed away on Sunday (*page 14*), also pulled down 18 rebounds in the game. For the series, he grabbed almost as many offensive rebounds (27) as Abdul-Jabbar had total boards (30). Philly—which had lost the '82 Finals to the Lakers in six games largely because Abdul-Jabbar dominated inside—won in a sweep. It was a fitting cap to a season in which Malone became just the fourth NBA player to win consecutive MVP awards.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
MANNY MILLAN
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





"People say, 'Oh my God, I can't read this.' And I'll say, 'You don't have to. I do.' A lot of people, like [CBS partner Dan Fouts], will type these notes out. I'm reluctant; there's still something about writing it down that gets it into my head."

"When the Dolphins went three-and-out on their opening drive of the season I remembered a stat I had: **Miami had the fewest three-and-outs in the NFL last year.** Nothing earth-shattering, but it was useful in the flow of the broadcast."

"I'll flip this sheet over when possession changes—defense is on the back. And this will live for the season. **I have Miami Week 4 [against the Jets], and I'll use this.**"

"If the team makes changes, I make changes. It's a cruel world. If they pull a guy, he's injured, whatever, I cover him up. **Backup QB Logan Thomas got released this week—there's an X through him.**"

"Height, weight, age, hometown—those rudimentary notes have to be in here. As the week and the year progresses, I add info that can help enhance the broadcast. It's not like I'm always starting from scratch every week. I have a dossier I've accumulated. Some of that info lives; some fades away. **Then, if the game goes south, you have things to talk about.**"

Miami Dolphins

Washington Redskins

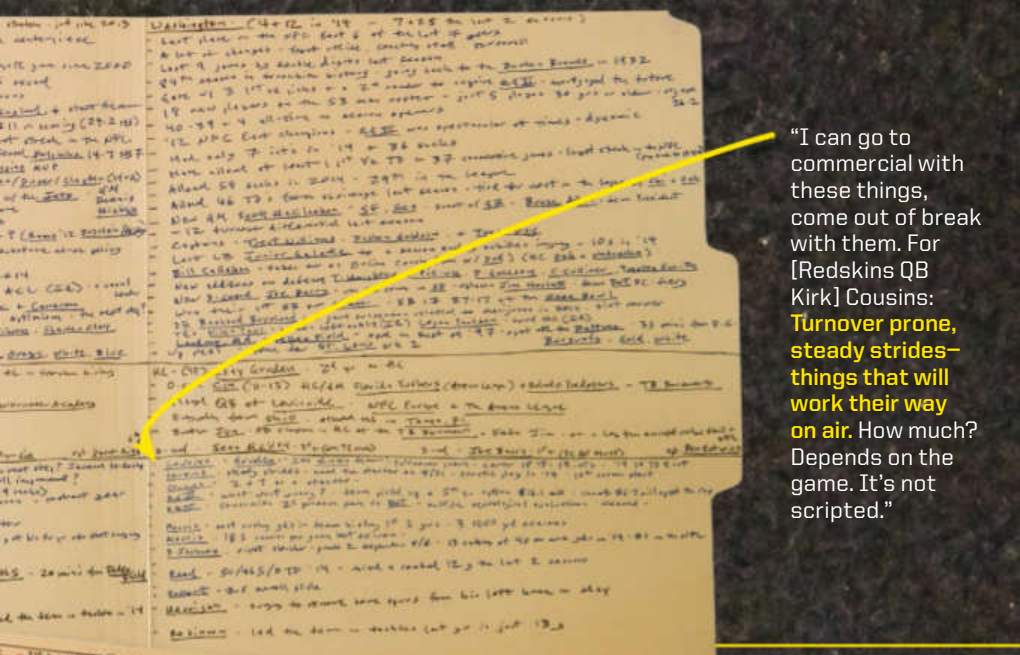
9/13/15

FedEx Field
(82,000)
Landover, Md

83H Matt HARRIS	76J Jordan LOVETT	63T Dallas HARRIS	51P Mike DUNCAN	75D John DUNCAN	70J John AMES	84C Jordan CANALE
74F John OK	66N Logan THOMAS	65B Brandon BENNETT	77T Tony VEATCH	72L John LONG	80S Brian SMITH	10S Steve STILES
4D Aaron DANKS	26M Mike SHARR	34W Dan WELLS	17T Ryan ANDERSON	8M Matt HARRIS	11P Pat ARMSTRONG	11L Andy LAWRENCE
3F Andrew RANKINS	27J James JAMES	27J James JAMES	5X Logan THOMAS	85T Tony ANDERSON	46H Hank ANDERSON	42P Brandon ANDERSON
19R Ryan ROSS	80C Ryan ROSS	71W Willie WELLS	77L Landon ANDERSON	78L Landon ANDERSON	75S Steve SMITH	76M Mike SHARR
5W Wayne WELLS	68C Chris CAMPBELL	74K Kevin KELLEY	67L Landon ANDERSON	61L Landon ANDERSON	79E Eric EVANS	89C Chris CAMPBELL
46M Mike SHARR	31T Tony ANDERSON	25C Chris CAMPBELL	8C Chris CAMPBELL	16M Mike SHARR	10C Chris CAMPBELL	36Y YOUNG
2F Kyle FORD	78L Landon ANDERSON	88C Chris CAMPBELL	14C Chris CAMPBELL	88C Chris CAMPBELL	51C Chris CAMPBELL	56C Chris CAMPBELL

27J James
JAMES


11T Brian
ANDERSON

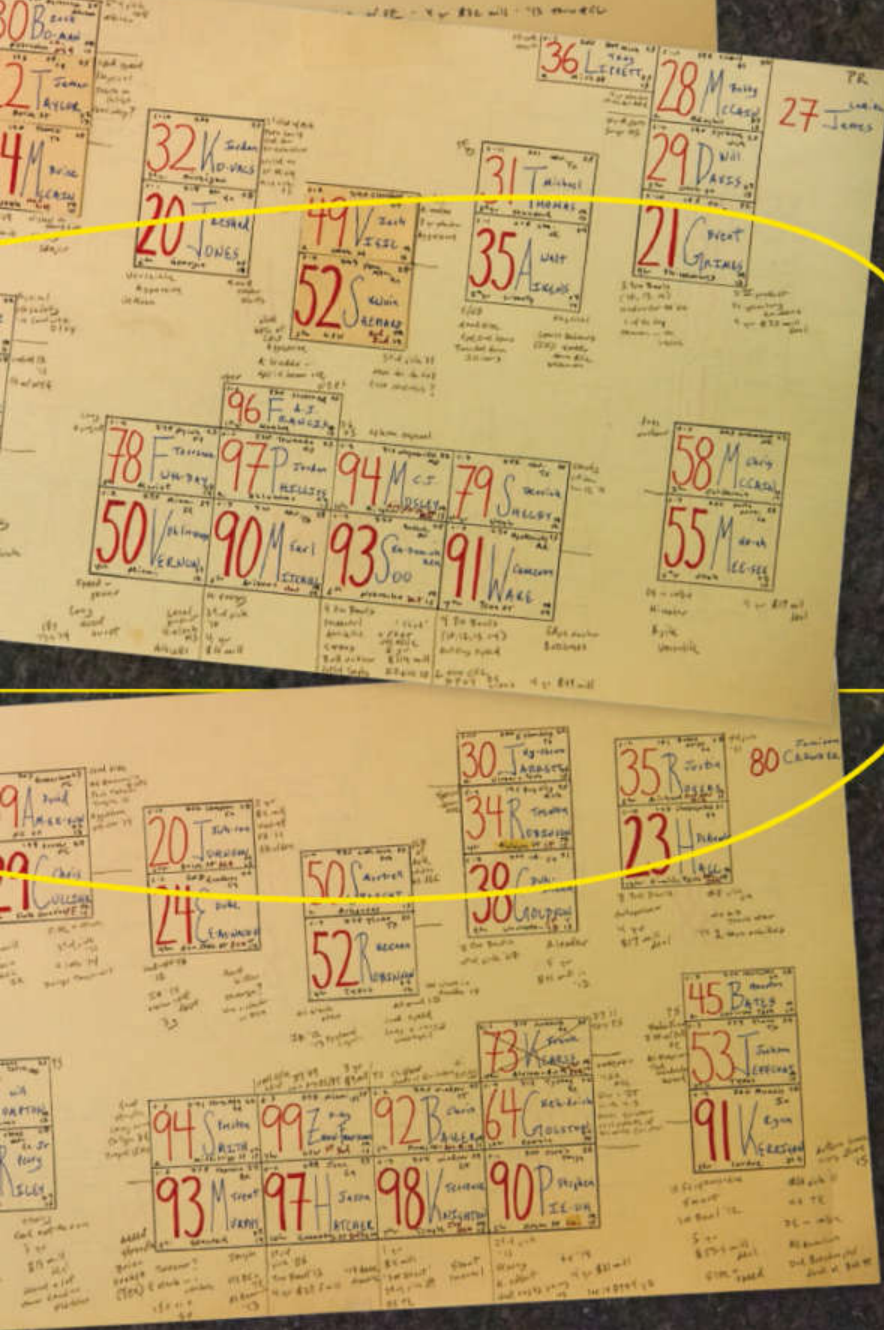


"I can go to commercial with these things, come out of break with them. For [Redskins QB Kirk] Cousins: Turnover prone, steady strides—things that will work their way on air. How much? Depends on the game. It's not scripted."

+

3 of 3

**Leading Off**



"This is my little scouting report on [Dolphins QB] Ryan Tannehill: strong arm, calm demeanor, excellent mechanics, just signed a six-year \$96 million extension, former wide receiver, degree in biology..."

"When [Redskins wideout] DeSean Jackson went down with a hamstring injury, I knew my chart had the quick info I needed: Ryan Grant, second year, from Tulane, good hands, excellent route runner. It was easy to find in the moment."

Take Note

■ Perhaps you've said it while watching an NFL broadcast: *I could call a game*. Newsflash: No, you couldn't. Calling a football game goes beyond a mere three hours of talking. For CBS play-by-play man Ian Eagle (*above*), the preparation starts every Monday at 8 a.m. and continues nonstop throughout the week as he scribbles down notes that, he says, "look like something from John Nash in *A Beautiful Mind*." Eventually those notes become these crib sheets, which Eagle worked from during Sunday's Dolphins-Redskins game. But the job is about more than just manila folders. "What separates guys in this business," says Eagle, is how they use this information during broadcasts in a way that feels organic, especially "when there are 20 other things happening around you." —Ben Baskin

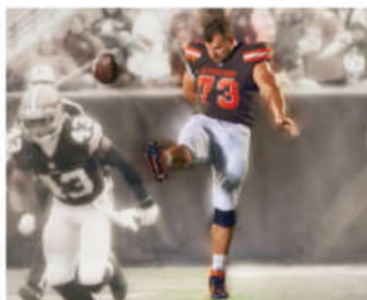
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
PATRICK MCDERMOTT
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

INBOX

FOR SEPT. 7-14, 2015

In **LEADING OFF: *Trading Places***, it was noteworthy to see that four of the seven players featured—**DeAndre Levy (54)**, **Joe Thomas (73)**, **J.J. Watt (99)** and **Russell Wilson (3)**—are former Badgers. What a testament to the quality of Wisconsin football.

Robert L. Hunt, Madison, Wis.



COVER



I'm only 13 years old, but even my hands can tell the difference between a ball that's inflated properly and one that's underinflated and easier to grab. I think judge Richard Berman's decision to overturn **Tom Brady's** suspension sends the wrong message to young football players like me. Shame on you, Mr. Brady, and shame on you, judge. Kory Cascadden
Los Angeles

Reading your article about how the Patriots treat visiting teams reminded me of another infamous Boston host, storied Celtics coach Red Auerbach. Legend has it he used to turn up the thermostat in the visitors' locker room but shut off the hot water to their showers. Is it something in the water in Beantown? Paul Knopick
Denton, Texas

The Patriots may as well change their team name to the Politicians. David J. Gross
St. Augustine, Fla.



While reading *Love Handles*, I could not help but wonder if **Steve Rushin** would be a tailback or a defensive lineman if he played in the NFL. I really got a (Jim) Kiick out of his piece.

Lee Lambers, Jenison, Mich.

NFL SCOUTING REPORTS

I greatly enjoyed your NFL preview issue, but in predicting the standings, you forecasted 255 wins and 257 losses across the league. That, of course, is mathematically impossible.

Jed Miller, Lakewood, N.J.

In the NFL preview you have the Giants and the Redskins losing to each other on Nov. 29. I realize that both teams may stink, but I don't think they'll both lose the same game.

Everett D. Thomas, Hammond, N.Y.



Alexander Wolff captured the palpable energy, enthusiasm and joy **Darryl Dawkins** brought to the game of life. The NBA legend's highlights are etched in my brain. Thank you for an obituary worthy of the great Dr. Dunkenstein.

Daniel Feigin, New York City



CONTACT SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

Letters E-mail SI at letters@SI.timeinc.com or fax SI at 212-467-2417. Letters should include the writer's full name, address and home telephone number and may be edited for clarity and space. **Customer Service and Subscriptions** For 24/7 service, go to SI.com/customerservice. Call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 30602, Tampa, FL 33630-0602. To purchase reprints of SI covers, go to SIcovers.com. **Advertising** For ad rates, an editorial calendar or a media kit, email SI at SIpubqueries@timeinc.com.

WITH **SNAPSHOT**, GREAT DRIVERS GET GREAT SAVINGS. HOWEVER, GREAT **CROQUET** PLAYERS WILL STILL GO UNRECOGNIZED. NOT THAT I'M BITTER.



IF YOU ASK ME, GOOD DRIVERS SHOULD BE REWARDED – THAT'S WHY WE CREATED **SNAPSHOT**.

Plug it in your car, and see if your good driving could help you save big with Progressive. We'll even let you try Snapshot® before you switch to us, so you've got nothing to lose. Rewarding good drivers. Now that's Progressive.

1.800.PROGRESSIVE | PROGRESSIVE.COM

©2015 Progressive Casualty Ins. Co. & affiliates. Insurance prices and products are different when purchased directly from Progressive or through independent agents/brokers. Snapshot not available in all states or situations.

Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH

SCORECARD

The Exodus

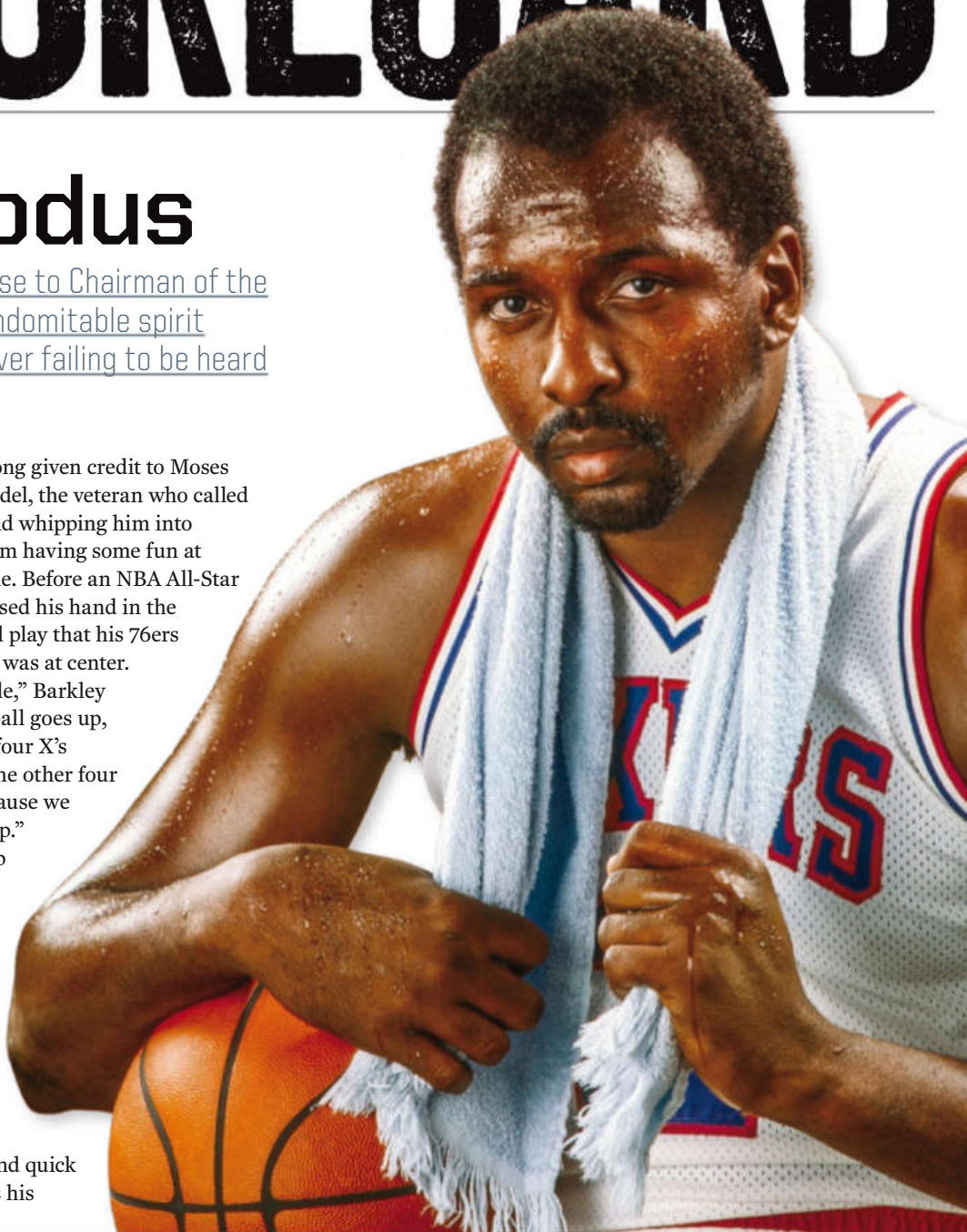
The late Moses Malone rose to Chairman of the Boards on effort and an indomitable spirit while saying little—but never failing to be heard

BY JACK MCCALLUM

CHARLES BARKLEY HAS long given credit to Moses Malone for being his role model, the veteran who called him out for being “fat and lazy” and whipping him into shape. That didn’t stop Charles from having some fun at Malone’s expense from time to time. Before an NBA All-Star game some years back, Barkley raised his hand in the locker room to offer up a jump-ball play that his 76ers supposedly employed when Moses was at center.

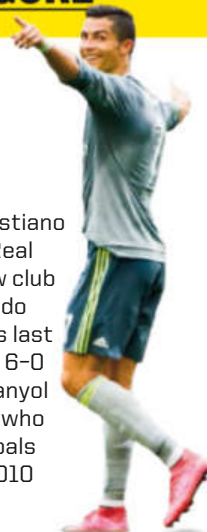
“Here’s Moses in the center circle,” Barkley said, grabbing the chalk. “So the ball goes up, and . . .”—Barkley then scribbled four X’s heading in the same direction—“the other four of us just run back on defense because we know Moses is going to lose the tap.”

Malone, 60, who died in his sleep on Sunday in Norfolk, was that rare superstar who was often defined by his limitations, the most obvious being a familiarity with gravity. True, it was often pointed out that Larry Bird wasn’t a leaper, but that declamation was generally followed by a listing of Bird’s preternatural vision, hand-eye coordination and ambidexterity. Moses was strong and quick to the ball, but his greatest gift was his



230

La Liga goals scored by Cristiano Ronaldo for Real Madrid, a new club record. Ronaldo had five goals last Saturday in a 6-0 win over Espanyol to pass Raúl, who tallied 228 goals from 1994-2010



\$2 billion

Average value of an NFL team, according to *Forbes*. At \$4 billion, the Cowboys topped the rankings for the ninth straight year and are now the most valuable sports franchise in the world.

8

Times a major league team has hit two grand slams in one inning after the Orioles did so last Friday against the Royals. Nolan Reimold and Steve Clevenger both hit slams in the eighth inning of a 14-8 win over Kansas City.

11



Consecutive Week 1 losses for the Browns, an NFL record. Cleveland, which lost 31-10 to the Jets on Sunday, has started 1-0 just once since rejoining the league in 1999.

indomitability, a quality difficult to illuminate on a poster. By and large, he didn't hang from kids' walls or get conjured up on the playground. Not a lot of kids dreamed of being Moses.

But an argument could be made that if you had to choose one center to win one game, you would go for the three-time MVP over all others, not because he was better offensively than Wilt Chamberlain or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, better defensively than Bill Russell, or better athletically than Hakeem Olajuwon or David Robinson. He was none of those. But over 48 minutes Moses would absolutely not be intimidated or outworked, no matter the opponent.

Malone's numbers are not staggering in the manner of Chamberlain's—whose are?—but he's near the top of every category that's relevant to centers (in the NBA he's eighth in scoring, fifth in rebounding, 24th in blocked shots) because he was so good for so long. Moses was the first high schooler to jump straight to the pros and the only one other than LeBron James to dominate in his first season, having averaged 18.8 points and 14.6 rebounds with the Utah Stars of the ABA in 1974-75. It was the first of his 15 double-double seasons—one more than Chamberlain, three more than Abdul-Jabbar.

Malone was best known for his rebounding, a product of his inexhaustible effort, his knowledge of backboard caroms and angles and a proclivity, some said, to miss his own shot on purpose, then go after the ball. His scoring was aided by an underrated part of his game—

he got to the line and made it count. Over his 21 professional seasons, Moses made 76.0% of his foul shots, better than other “touch” centers such as Patrick Ewing (74.0%) and Abdul-Jabbar (72.1%), and let's not even bring up Wilt or Shaquille O'Neal, notorious stonemasons each.

In one respect Malone was the polar opposite of another 76ers center who died recently and way too young: Darryl Dawkins. (Moses and Dawkins just missed being teammates in Philly. Moses arrived before the championship year of 1982-83, one week after Dawkins was shipped to the New Jersey Nets.) Dawkins talked willingly and lucidly—as lucidly as a man from the planet Lovetron could—while Moses, when inclined to speak, was reliably, and mumblingly, unintelligible. In 1986, after he had been traded to the Bullets, I approached him for an interview, and he said something that sounded like “Uohmeacovah.” I asked him to repeat it, asked him again, asked him again, and finally Moses stared down at me—6' 10" of imperiousness—and said, distinctively: “You. Owe. Me. A Cover.” Two years earlier SI had interviewed Moses for a story that was slated for the cover but never ran.

Moses was a reminder that speaking the King's English is a barometer of neither the intelligence nor the honor one brings to the game. We should ask our athletes to play with heart and ferocity, and this Moses Malone did, to a greater extent than anyone I can think of. He was on five SI covers—but, Moses, we still probably owe you one. □





BASKETBALL

+
Block Party

Dikembe Mutombo makes the Hall

LAST FRIDAY, DIKEMBE MUTOMBO headlined an 11-member class inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame. Despite being an eight-time All-Star in his 18 seasons with six teams, Mutombo (*right*, 55) was really a force on just one side of the ball. He had 3,289 blocks, second most in league history, and was a four-time Defensive Player of the Year. But his career-scoring average of 9.8 points per game is the second lowest among those enshrined in Springfield solely for their careers as players. Below is one Hall of Famer in each of the four major team sports who ranks at the bottom of notable categories.



				
Stat	<u>Points per Game: 7.3</u>	<u>Home Runs: 11</u>	<u>Touchdown Passes: 97</u>	<u>Goals: 51</u>
Player	Dennis Rodman	Ray Schalk	Bob Waterfield	Rod Langway
Skinny	The Worm turned in so many stellar seasons on the glass—he led the league in rebounding from 1991-92 to '97-98—that it was easy for Hall voters to overlook his sorry scoring. Among HOFers only Buddy Jeanette, a coach and executive who scored 7.2 points per game in pre-NBA leagues, has a lower career average.	Among position players from baseball's modern era (1901-present) to make it to Cooperstown, no one hit fewer long balls than Schalk, who played 18 big league seasons and is best known for being the catcher on the 1919 Black Sox. This season alone, 157 players have hit at least 11 home runs.	Jim Finks had 55 TD passes, but he made it to Canton for his work as an executive, leaving Bob Waterfield as the QB with the fewest TDs in the Hall. Waterfield threw 97 touchdowns for the Rams from 1945 to '52, or just three more than Peyton Manning had in the past two seasons with the Broncos.	Among those who played solely in the expansion era (since 1967-68), Viacheslav Fetisov has the fewest goals, 36. But because he didn't get to the NHL until 1989, when he was 31, the Red Army star gets a pass here in favor of fellow blueliner Langway, who played for the Canadiens and the Capitals from 1978-79 to '92-93.



Hero to Zero

The PGA Tour had off before this week's BMW Championship at Conway Farms Golf Club in Lake Forest, Ill., so like any good Texan, Jordan Spieth took the opportunity to watch football. Last Saturday the former Longhorn—sporting his Masters green jacket on the sideline—saw his old school beat up Rice 42-28 at home. (Bonus: At halftime the band spelled out his name.) On Sunday he was in a box at AT&T Stadium for the Cowboys-Giants game, sitting next to Tiger Woods. Spieth has risen to No. 2 in the world, but he still can't outshine the former No. 1. When the cameras showed the pair, NBC noted only golf's current 178th-ranked player.

IT'S THE STOPS
THAT INSPIRE
US TO GO.

Toyota Camry | toyota.com/camry

Prototype shown with options. Production model will vary. ©2015 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.



**Let's
Go
Places**

Top Crops

Ever want to lose yourself in Rex Ryan's face? An aerial roundup of this year's top sports-related farm-field mazes



BUFFALO WIN

New Bills coach Ryan received a flattering welcome to the region with a replica of his face cut into the fields at Stokoe Farms in Scottsville, N.Y.



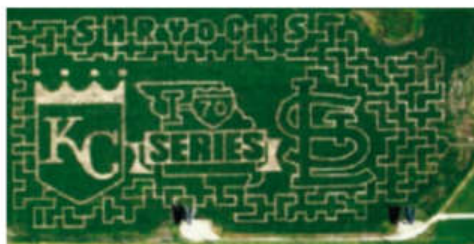
HAWK LOOKOUT

The Stanley Cup champion Blackhawks got a large and lovingly detailed tribute at Richardson Adventure Farm in Spring Grove, Ill.



ALL HAIL

The Kings received the royal treatment at Cool Patch Pumpkin farm in Dixon, Calif., which prominently features the NBA team's logo.



STATE'S FIGHTS

The Cardinals and Royals, cross-Missouri rivals, had their logos etched into Shryocks Callaway Farm along I-70, about halfway between the two cities.



TRUE STORY

NASCAR driver Martin Truex Jr. and his number 78 car have been honored at Donaldson Farms in Hackettstown, in his home state of New Jersey.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

DuBois (Pa.) High scored 90 points and threw for 782 yards in its game against Meadville—and lost by 17.

BYU

The cardiac Cougars pulled off another last-minute miracle to beat Boise State 35-24. It's like they're on a mission.



HOT 
NOT 



Drew Storen

The Nats reliever was lost for the season when he broke his thumb slamming a locker shut on Sept. 9. Guess he wanted to prove he was a powerful closer.

WHAT MAKES *ThermaCare*[®] DIFFERENT? IT HEALS.



Unlike creams and rubs that mask the pain, **ThermaCare**[®] has patented heat cells that penetrate deep to increase circulation and accelerate healing.

HEAT + RELIEF + HEALING = THERMACARE[®]
The Proof That It Heals Is You.

Like us on [facebook.com/thermacare](https://www.facebook.com/thermacare) and visit us at thermacare.com

© 2015 Pfizer Inc. Use as directed.

THEY
SAID IT



“HE HAD NINE RBIS? A FOUR-HOUR GAME—I FORGOT ABOUT ALL OF THAT.”

Ned Yost

Royals manager trying to conjure the details of third baseman Mike Moustakas's performance last Saturday, which included a grand slam and a three-run homer in a 14-6 rain-delayed win over the Orioles.



Nick Pratto | *Huntington Beach, Calif.* | *Baseball*

Nick, a senior lefthander at Huntington Beach High, struck out nine and allowed just one run on six hits to lead the U.S.'s 18-and-under team to a 2-1 win over Japan and a third straight world championship. In two tournament starts he pitched 14 $\frac{1}{3}$ innings, giving up two earned runs while fanning 17. Nick has verbally committed to USC.



Paige Hofstad | *New Braunfels, Texas* | *Cross-country*

Paige, a senior at New Braunfels High, won the Class 6A title at the 5K Southlake Carroll Invitational in 17:23.13. It was her first major race since being sidelined with a left-hip stress fracture in March. In 2014, Paige finished second at the Nike Cross Nationals and fourth at the Foot Locker Nationals and was Texas's Gatorade cross-country runner of the year.



Carandal Hale | *Greenville, Texas* | *Football*

Carandal, a senior running back at Greenville High, raced 50 yards for a touchdown with 58 seconds left to lift the Lions to a 21-14 win over North Garland High. He finished with 282 yards and three TDs on 18 carries. The following week Carandal gained 383 yards on 11 carries with four scores in a 60-41 loss to Royse City High.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited by ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Claudia Bowman | *Barrington, N.J.* | *Field Hockey*

Claudia, a senior right wing at Haddon Heights High, began the season with a hat trick in a 6-2 victory over Gateway High. Her team-high 15 goals last year helped the Garnets reach the Central Jersey Group 1 quarterfinals. Claudia was also runner-up in the 400-meter hurdles at the Group 1 state meet in May.



Cooper Woodyard | *The Woodlands, Texas* | *Football*

Woodyard, a junior quarterback at Division III Austin College in Sherman, Texas, threw for 311 yards and two touchdowns and rushed for 86 yards and two more scores in a 55-41 win over Hendrix College. Making his first start at quarterback after playing wide receiver the past two seasons, he completed 15 of 30 passes.



Sydney Miles | *Oklahoma City* | *Volleyball*

Miles, a 6'1" senior setter at Emory, had 33 assists and two aces in a 3-0 season-opening win over Birmingham Southern. She was also named to the Calvin College Labor Day Weekend Invitational all-tournament team after averaging 11.93 assists, 2.57 digs and 0.94 blocks for the Eagles, who are ranked No. 1 in Division III.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.



INTRODUCING 2-YEAR TV PRICE LOCK

NO HIDDEN MONTHLY FEES

\$49⁹⁹ | 190 CHANNELS
MO | HOPPER[®] SMART DVR

PLUS YOU CHOOSE



Watch all your touchdowns on Sunday afternoons
with NFL RedZone from NFL Network.

NETFLIX

-or-



NO NEED
TO CALL.
AUTOMATICALLY
REMOVED
AFTER 1 YEAR.*

Included for 1 year with no hassle.

Requires credit qualification, 24-month commitment with early termination fee and e-bill autopay.

1-888-888-DISH | DISH.COM

Important Terms and Conditions: Upfront Fees: Activation and upfront receiver upgrade fees may apply based on credit qualification. **ETF:** Early termination fee of \$20 for each month remaining applies if you cancel early. **\$49.99 Price lock includes** America's Top 120 Plus and DVR fee for 1 TV. Available upgrades: \$7/mo. for each additional TV (receivers with additional functionality may be \$10-\$12); \$64.99/mo for America's Top 200; \$74.99/mo for America's Top 250. **Price lock does not include:** Taxes or state-specific surcharges, add-on programming (including premium channels), protection plan or transactional fees. Applicable monthly fees, upfront fees or transactional fees for business customers. After 24 months, then-current prices and fees for all services apply. **Miscellaneous:** All packages, programming, features, and functionality and all prices and fees not included in price lock are subject to change without notice. Offer for new customers only. Offer for new customers only. ***Netflix:** Offer expires on October 30, 2015. Valid for twelve (12) months of Netflix Service on the \$8.99 (per month) "Two Screens at a Time Streaming Plan" (for total value of \$107.88). Hopper w/Sling or other Netflix compatible device and Internet required. Not available with dishNET satellite internet. Existing Netflix customers will return to normal billing after \$107.88 credit is exhausted. Offer is not redeemable or refundable for cash, subject to applicable law, and cannot be exchanged for Netflix Gift Subscriptions. You may apply the value of the offer to a different plan, or other services offered by Netflix. Exchanges in this manner may alter the duration of the offer. Netflix service price plans subject to change. Limit one promotion toward each monthly membership fee for your Netflix account. For details, please visit www.netflix.com/termsofuse. **Offer ends 10/30/15.**

© 2015 DISH Network L.L.C. All rights reserved.

Brand_16947



JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by DAN PATRICK

DAN PATRICK: *When was the last time you were late for practice?*

ANDREW LUCK: As a freshman [at Stanford]. I forgot to put my phone alarm off silent and I slept through a lift [session]. It's the worst feeling in the world, and you realize it's light out. Telling coach [Jim] Harbaugh was not a pleasant experience.

DP: *What did he say?*

AL: He had some choice words for me and then told me to go do my punishment lifts.

DP: *What did you do better as a rookie?*

AL: Sometimes ignorance is bliss. As a rookie you might not understand the gravity of certain things. You just sort of go out and play ball. That being said, I wouldn't want to be a rookie again.

DP: *What's the lasting memory of your first NFL season?*

AL: Coach [Chuck] Pagano being in the hospital and fighting for his life [after being diagnosed with leukemia in 2012], and the perspective that puts on playing a football season; Bruce Arians stepping in [to coach] and doing an incredible job. I also have this image of [wide receiver] Reggie Wayne wearing orange gloves during a Packers



ANDREW LUCK

DIALING IT UP

Already a familiar name in the NFL record book in just his fourth season, the Colts' 26-year-old QB continues to improve—you might say he has the number of more and more teams every year.

game, going for over 200 yards and scoring the last touchdown.

DP: *How many NFL quarterbacks' numbers do you have in your phone?*

AL: A fair amount. More than 10. Is my dad [Oliver] included?

DP: *Could you text Tom Brady right now?*

AL: I don't have his number, so no.

DP: *Shouldn't quarterbacks be able to do what they want to a football, including adjust air pressure?*

AL: I guess. I just throw the balls that the Colts give us.

DP: *It's a silly rule.*

AL: I don't know if it's my place to comment on the rules.

DP: *How would you evaluate your acting in DirecTV commercials this off-season?*

AL: [Laughs.] Oh, man. Poor.

DP: *You seemed to pass on a lot of endorsements early on.*

AL: Part of the plan was to take care of things on the football field first. The natural progression is that you do a little more and a little more.

DP: *[Indianapolis running back] Frank Gore said in the off-season that you're a football god.*

AL: I don't know about that. That might have been taken out of context.

DP: *Have you told Frank not to refer to you as Andrew anymore?*

AL: Frank can call me whatever he wants. He's a god amongst running backs.

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Former Redskins coach **Mike Shanahan**

discussed why he thinks Robert Griffin III has struggled: "Once you go to a scheme that you haven't used throughout your career, it does take some time [to learn]. I don't think [owner] Dan Snyder or Robert realized what it was going to take for him to make that step." ... Fox analyst



Troy Aikman believes the

Cowboys shouldn't underestimate the importance of a quality running back. "Their offensive line is exceptionally talented," he said. "But I have more respect for the guys who carry the football. I don't think



you can plug just anyone in there." ...

Giants quarterback **Eli Manning** explained his reluctance to use social media. "I don't have a whole lot of interest in it," he told me. "I don't have to let the world know every time I do something special, unique or interesting."

FOLD PAGE →



SO **B** MEETS **A**

A

B

GO EASY ON ME GUYS! ALL
THIS YELLING IS
MAKING ME ANXIOUS.
THERE'S GOTTA BE A WAY
TO CHEER QUIETLY!

A

B

YOU'RE NOT YOU WHEN YOU'RE HUNGRY.®



**SNICKERS® IS A
PROUD SPONSOR
OF THE NFL**



SNICKERS
SATISFIES

®/™ Trademarks © Mars, Incorporated 2015. NFL® Logo is a trademark of the National Football League.

The Case for . . .

Yoenis Cespedes (But not for MVP)

BY JOE SHEEHAN

THE METS' RISE to the top of the NL East is inextricably tied to their trade with the Tigers for Yoenis Cespedes. Since Cespedes debuted with New York on Aug. 1, the Mets have turned a two-game deficit to the Nationals into a 9½-game lead, going 29–11 and scoring more than six runs per game. Cespedes has been a huge part of that surge, hitting .308/.353/.680 with 16 home runs and 41 RBIs. The timing of his hits has been critical too. Take, for instance, his three-run double in the seventh inning to help the Mets come from six runs down to win in Washington on Sept. 8, and his go-ahead, eighth-inning home run the next night to help New York cap a three-game sweep that all but secured the team's first division title since 2006.

The Mets' dominance and Cespedes's rampage have given birth to the idea that he is a legitimate candidate for the National League MVP award. And while Cespedes has indeed been the most valuable Met during his time in New York and helped make his new team a serious October threat, it's a leap from that to saying he deserves a full-season honor.

Obviously Cespedes's NL-only numbers don't measure up to

those of Washington's Bryce Harper or Arizona's Paul Goldschmidt, and if a player is going to become a candidate based on two hot months, he would need to have had the hottest two months of any player in the league. Harper, though, has outplayed Cespedes even since the latter arrived in the senior circuit, hitting .338/.477/.571 since Aug. 1. Then there's Cincinnati's Joey Votto, who has a .517 OBP in that time, or Pittsburgh's Andrew McCutchen, at .314/.436/.540.

The MVP award isn't entirely a statistical one, of course, and parsing the word *valuable* has become an annual late-summer parlor game. Think back to 2008, when Manny Ramirez went from the Red Sox to the Dodgers at the July 31 trade deadline and hit like Miguel Cabrera's big brother for two months in leading Los Angeles

to the NL West title. Ramirez's line in the NL—.396/.489/.743—dwarfed what Cespedes has done and carried just as much importance to the Dodgers. It led to only a fourth-place finish in the MVP balloting.

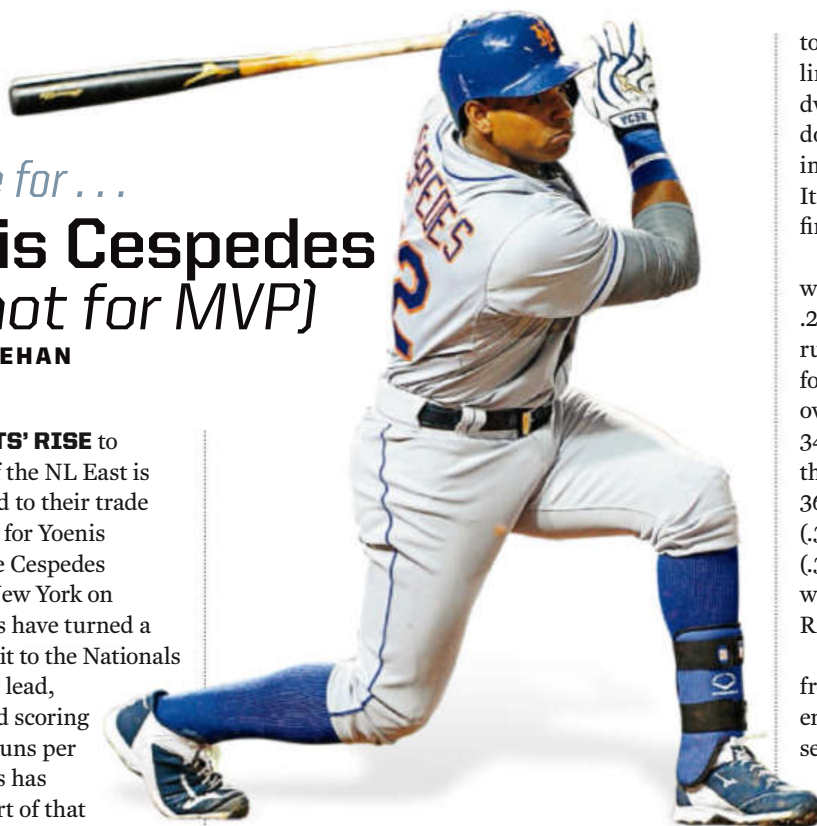
Even including Cespedes's work in the AL—he hit .293/.323/.506 with 18 home runs and 61 RBIs in 102 games for Detroit—would still leave his overall numbers (.297/.332/.558, 34 homers, 102 RBIs) behind those of Harper (.333/.463/.648, 36, 85), Goldschmidt (.316/.431/.553, 28, 99) and Votto (.315/.459/.555, 27, 72) and on par with Cubs first baseman Anthony Rizzo (.278/.388/.523, 29, 88).

Voters tend to prefer sluggers from playoff-bound teams enjoying clearly superior seasons, but there is no such

option in the NL this year.

Harper is putting up huge numbers on the league's most disappointing team. The top hitters on playoff contenders are McCutchen and Rizzo, but their numbers are hardly overwhelming. The two best candidates on October-bound clubs are starting pitchers: the Dodgers' Zack Greinke and Clayton Kershaw, but despite the fact that Kershaw won last year, he is the only pitcher to win the NL MVP since Bob Gibson in '68.

Into that void dropped Cespedes. His near-nightly heroics for the transformed Mets may explain the desire to find a better story for MVP than Harper, whose 198 OPS+ is merely the second-highest by a 22-year-old in the modern era, behind only Ted Williams in 1941. It's not the Most Valuable Narrative award, however, and as tantalizing a tale as Cespedes and the Mets have been, when the ballots are cast, Harper's name should be on top. □



1.033


Cespedes's OPS since debuting with the Mets on Aug. 1

1.048

Bryce Harper's OPS since Aug. 1

29-11

The Mets' record since Aug. 1, best in the National League



A series from the Editors of
Sports Illustrated AND **WebMD**

The Comeback

STORIES OF RESILIENCE

Tune in on 9/30 for the next installment

si.com/thecomeback



PRESSU POINTS

OMNIPRESENT AUTHORITY

Djokovic's flexibility and full court coverage stifled Federer's attacking style—and helped the champ fight off 19 of 23 break point opportunities.

Photograph by
Simon Bruty for Sports Illustrated

RE

THE U.S. OPEN IS THE TOUGHEST VENUE IN TENNIS, WHETHER YOU'RE FIGHTING THE HEADWINDS OF A HOSTILE CROWD OR CARRYING THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY ON YOUR RACKET. BUT NEW YORKERS HAVE BIG HEARTS, TOO: WHILE NOVAK DJOKOVIC WON OVER FANS WITH HIS MASTERLY FINALS WIN, ADMIRATION FOR SERENA WILLIAMS ONLY INTENSIFIED EVEN AS SHE FELL SHORT OF A GRAND SLAM
BY L. JON WERTHEIM



I

t can be a tough room, Arthur Ashe Stadium. The 23,000 fans that wreath the court come to be entertained. They want their chosen favorites in the U.S. Open to succeed. The more the performers seek audience approval, however, the less likely it is to be granted. Rough crowd, rough crowd.

Novak Djokovic might be a peerless tennis player, the clear-cut No. 1, the reigning Wimbledon champ, the kind of citizen-of-the-world who attends a black-tie function at the U.N. on the eve of the tournament. A player whose biggest sin might be ripping his shirts in mid-match acts of self-flagellation. But he is not American. Nor is he Rafael Nadal or Roger Federer. He is not a magician; he's merely a technician who plays immaculate tennis. So it is that—for all his excellence, for all his popularity elsewhere in the tennis circuit, for all the ground he's gained on the sport's historical records—Djokovic has played to *meh* reviews in New York.

Crowds, though, can be won over. And late Sunday night, after subduing the overwhelmingly more popular Federer in a classic U.S. Open final, Djokovic made inroads at last. After hugging his team and wife Jelena in the stands, he made his way back onto the court. As he passed the masses, the same fans who'd been booing him and yelling out when he served or cheering when he double-faulted were now straining to pat him on the back and zap selfies. Finally there was some admiration—even if the grudging variety—for the performance they had just witnessed.

Djokovic hadn't simply won the tournament for the second time. He hadn't simply overcome both a motivated adversary across the net and 23,000 or so adversarial fans above him. He'd offered a 200-minute demonstration of his subtle greatness. That is how he's won 10 majors during the reign of Federer and Nadal, venturing ever further into tennis's GOAT (Greatest of All Time) pasture.

Hitting the ball past an opponent is one way to win matches. But making the opponent press is another. Djokovic's I-know-your-password anticipation and defense is so maddening, his play on big points so stingy, that it forces players to recalibrate their risk-reward ratio. "You end up going for too much," says 2014 U.S. Open champ Marin Cilic, whom Djokovic waxed 6–0, 6–1, 6–2 in the semifinals, "because that's the only way you can win."

The world's No. 2 knows this all too well. For the first six rounds in New York, every day was #ThrowbackThursday, with Federer, now 34, no longer at the peak of his powers, impersonating the guy who dominated a decade ago. Before the finals he'd dropped zero sets and unsheathed a new tactic, acronymed SABR—Sneak Attack By Roger—that entailed charging in on opponents' second serves, turning his returns into approach shots. In truth, SABR was of limited pragmatic value—good, at most, for a few points each match. But the symbolic value was immeasurable, an indication that Federer is not just still out there; he's down in the basement innovating, tinkering, trying to come up with new ways to improve.

In the final, though, neither SABR nor other weapons were enough to penetrate Djokovic's defense. Like all the others,



SUDDENLY IT IS DJOKOVIC WHO HAS TURNED



LAST MAN STANDING

Djokovic sparred with the raucous pro-Federer crowd for most of the match, then felt the love after his impressive victory.



Check out the Beyond the Baseline podcast with Jon Wertheim each week for the latest tennis buzz and hot topics at SI.com/podcasts

Federer allowed himself only the smallest of margins, aiming for the lines. When he hit his targets, he gave himself chances to win his 18th major and delight the crowd. But Djokovic made Federer cave when it mattered most, causing the five-time U.S. Open champion to miss 19 break point opportunities, and closed out an enthralling match 6–4, 5–7, 6–4, 6–4. “I had too many break chances that I didn’t capitalize on,” said Federer. “One after the other. I should have done better and could have done better.”

With a laughable match record of 63–5 in 2015, Djokovic is rounding out one of the all-time great seasons in tennis history. Suddenly it is the Djoker who has turned in the best Grand Slam campaign of '15. Which is a considerable upset because throughout the summer and much

of this event, the prominent, dominant theme was whether Serena Williams could achieve the Grand Slam, winning all four majors in a single year. In the semifinals the answer came in the form of a resounding “No.”

The music ended without a soaring crescendo. History was thwarted not with a spectacular act of violence—a strafing ace or a whistling ground stroke—but with a half volley, a shot that demands delicacy and a feathery touch. At around 3 p.m. last Friday, Roberta Vinci tiptoed near the net and barely brushed the ball with her racket, depositing it gently on Serena’s side of the court, where it bounced multiple times and died a quiet death.

WITH THAT small bit of shotmaking, one of the greatest upsets in tennis had been consecrated.

And the tenor of the 2015 U.S. Open, the tennis season and (trafficking in only minor exaggeration) the year’s entire sportscape changed dramatically. Throughout the tournament the conventional wisdom was that *the player with the best chance of beating Serena Williams is Serena Williams*. And here, in the semifinals—just two matches to win and pull off one of the most formidable feats in sports—that’s precisely what happened. Paralyzed by nerves, moving so sluggishly it looked like cinder blocks had been tied to her

Nikes, Serena fell 2–6, 6–4, 6–4 to Vinci, a 32-year-old Italian and career journeydonna, ranked 43rd and best known for her doubles play.

Credit Vinci. She played the match of her life and met the moment. Her consistency, slicing and sly, rhythm-resistant play made her the worst possible

IN THE BEST GRAND SLAM CAMPAIGN OF '15

opponent for Williams. But this was also about Serena buckling under the weight of the occasion. Asked how tight she perceived Serena to be, Vinci smiled: “A lot.”

As Serena left the court, the gasps and groans were audible, not least in the television compound, as ratings for the final had just, inevitably, fallen sharply. But before that, Serena’s tournament had been soundtracked with the much more pleasant audio: cheers. The kind that were full-throated, unqualified and without ambivalence. It reinforced this point: Serena’s pursuit of the 2015 Grand Slam may have had all the earmarks of a classic quest, a hero completing a series of tasks in different regions. But at its essence, this was a love story. Which made the unfulfilling and unfulfilled ending even more of a pity.

Like most sports, tennis knows of star-crossed love, of timing gone sideways, of opportunities slipped away, of towering figures not fully appreciated until they’re gone. (“Where was all this when I was playing?” Pete Sampras asked about the fans’ affection during his retirement ceremony.) There are players who, after the fact, lament that they should have shown more devotion and loyalty to the sport. With Serena Williams and tennis, both parties found each other in time. When Donald Trump was spotted in a suite mouthing, “I love Serena,” he was, for a change, capturing majority sentiment.

Sure, in previous years Serena and tennis were an on-again, off-again item. There were long arguments and much apportioning of blame. How much of the establishment’s blaring slight of the Williams sisters was tennis’s tendency for insularity (or worse) and how much owed to Serena’s decision to operate opaquely on the margins? No matter; there’s been reconciliation.

For the first 12 days, anyway, the U.S. Open was the Serena-rama. It was her pursuit of history, with a tennis tournament tacked on. When Serena played her sister Venus, now 35, in the quarterfinals, Williams Bowl XXVII drew a capacity crowd including a celebrity cohort to rival the Oscars. Oprah, Trump, Justin Timberlake, assorted Jenners and Kardashians were there; so was tennis royalty, from John McEnroe to Martina Navratilova. As always it was a psychologically fraught affair. So much so that neither of the Williams’s parents attended, while their two older sisters, Isha and Lyndrea, sat together on a couch in the players’ lounge, their backs to the television. Serena won a hard-hitting match 6–2, 1–6, 6–3 amid a flat atmosphere. But as the sisters hugged at the net, it triggered a prolonged standing ovation and some of the loudest applause of the entire tournament. The unmistakable message: We get you, we are fond of you, we appreciate our good fortune in getting to watch you all these years.

And it wasn’t just the fans. Remember how other players once rooted against Serena behind her back, often crowding around the locker room TVs to vocally cheer her opponents, seldom issuing much in the way of praise? No longer. In New York, player after player admitted to openly rooting for Serena to pull off the Slam. The male players were happy to stand by while the tournament was hijacked by Serena. “I want to see her



NON CI CREDO

The Italian phrase—*I don’t believe it in English*—was a shared sentiment for Vinci (right, in pink) after her win over Williams (above) and Pennetta (far right), who won her first Grand Slam title.



do this, of course,” said Djokovic. “We all want to see her do it.” And the women were equally gracious. Simona Halep—the second seed, mind you—captured the mood among WTA players when she asserted, “If I will not be in the final, then I want her to win.”

AS TENNIS has embraced Serena, she has hugged back. There was a time when she professed boredom with her game. She took pains to divorce herself from tennis culture, took pride in not caring about the sport’s history. She led us to believe it was only a matter of months before she would walk out on the relationship, seduced as she was by Hollywood, fashion and celebrity. As for her colleagues, she once played a game with herself, whereby she would attend press conferences and refuse to refer to any other players by name.

Today? She is a ubiquitous presence, popular in the locker room, more engaged in her mid-30s than she was in her mid-20s. Some of her best friends are other players. If she was once like

AL TELEMANS FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (WILLIAMS); SIMON BRUTY FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (VINCI AND PENNETTA)

DESPITE THIS BRUTAL LOSS, SERENA TURNED



Download the
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED
app on your tablets
and smartphones
for exclusive
photos from the
U.S. Open, including
shots of women's
doubles champs
Martina Hingis and
Sania Mirza.



an undergrad who walked around declaring her intention to transfer to a cooler school, now, as a senior, she is the student body president.

Most crucially Serena fell in love with the craft. By her own reckoning, her training sessions once varied greatly in intensity. She was famously casual about her equipment, among the last players to still use natural gut strings. She was openly dismissive of scouting, sometimes barely knowing the identity of opponents until she took the court, declaring, “I only really worry about my side of the net.” *See ball, hit ball* was her operating philosophy. Now? Much like Djokovic, she cuts the figure of an athlete who enjoys the process as much as she does the outcome. She is almost a tennis wonk. On Sept. 8 she beat Venus. Before 9 a.m. the next morning she was back on the practice courts, going through a targeted drill in which she brought back her racket—now adorned with high-tech polyester string—to flick low-bouncing balls over the net. Why? Because she knew

that Vinci would come armed with a nasty slice backhand.

All that professionalism, though, still couldn’t prepare her for the attack of nerves in the semis, what Patrick Mouratoglou, Serena’s coach, termed, “A bad day, a passive day, a tight day.” It hurt all the more the following day when Vinci regressed to her mean, losing to another thirtysomething Italian, Flavia Pennetta, 7–6, 6–2 in a highly entertaining if unexpected final. A well-liked and well-rounded player, Pennetta won what was, by an order of magnitude, the biggest match of her career. It was her first title of the year, her first Slam win in singles.

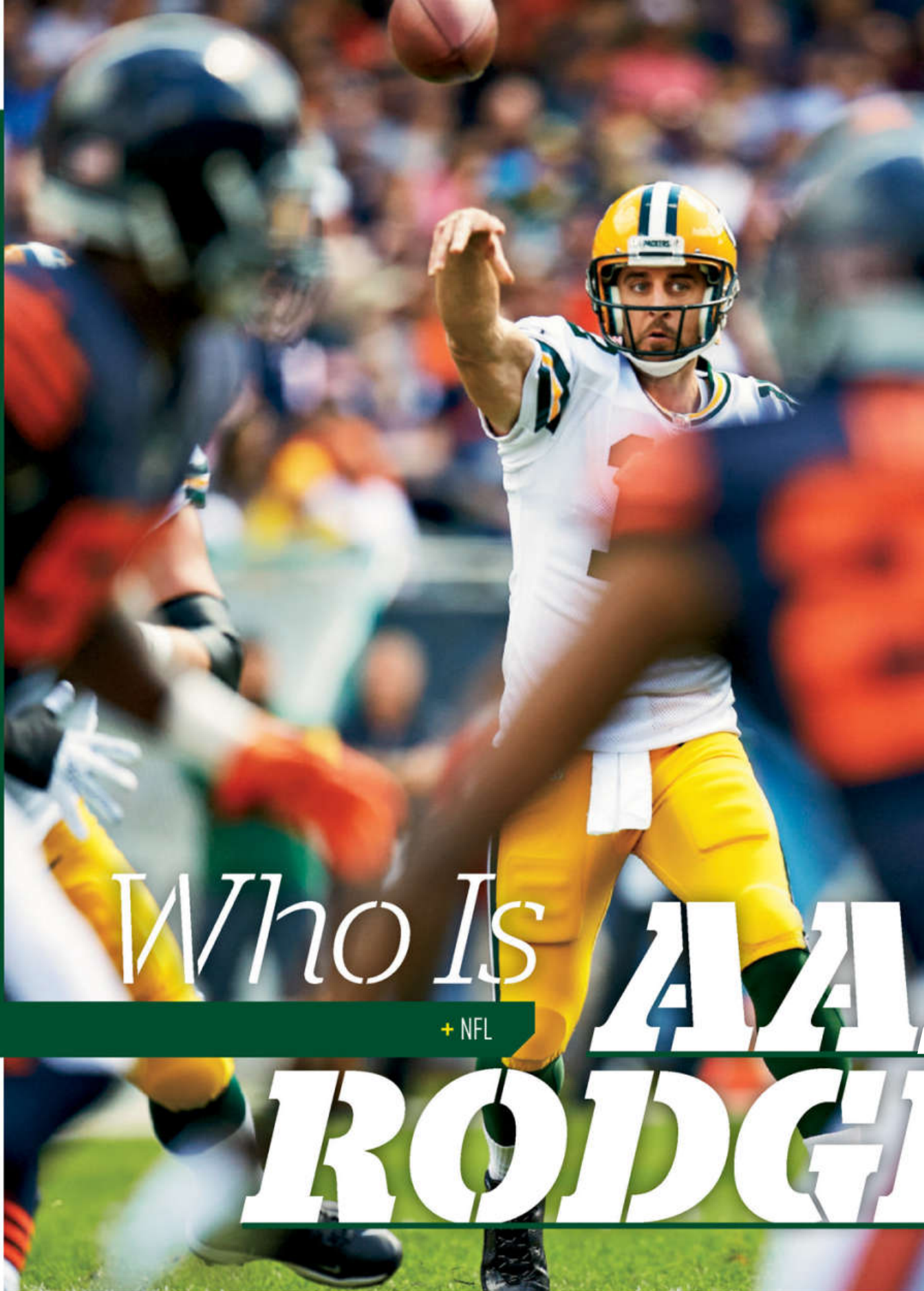
When Pennetta termed the tournament “dreamlike,” it was neither cliché nor hyperbole. Her second-round match was interrupted when a drone crashed in the stands. (A New York City teacher, operating the drone from a nearby park, was arrested on charges of reckless endangerment.) The next night Pennetta’s fiancé, the mercurial Italian player Fabio Fognini, beat Nadal in five sets. Pennetta arrived at the courts bleary-eyed the next day and lost the first set of her match 6–1 before rallying to win. She then strung together four more victories. And—presumably because her tournament needed still another drama—upon receiving the trophy last Saturday afternoon, she pulled the ultimate mike drop and declared her retirement from tennis. (A \$3.3 million U.S. Open check makes for an awfully nice golden parachute.)

Serena, who turns 34 on Sept. 26, may be five months Pennetta’s senior. But as with Federer, retirement is not in her immediate plans. There are still more titles to win, more ways to solidify her claim as the Greatest of All Time, a title that may be mythical but means a great deal to her. “Motivation will not be hard for her after this,” says Mouratoglou.

He’s right. Despite this brutal loss, his charge turned in one of the greatest seasons in sports: three major titles, a 53–3 record and a monstrous points lead in the rankings. She hits the ball as cleanly and forcefully as ever. Her legs are not diminished. Which is to say, there’s no reason she can’t make another run at the Slam in 2016.

After her stunning loss on Friday, Serena endured a brief exit interview. (“I don’t want to talk about how disappointing it is for me.”) While that was still another sign of professionalism—in previous years she might have left and eaten the fine, Marshawn Lynch-style—she was the picture of despondency. Without showering or changing clothes, headphones wrapped tight, she headed from the locker room into a black SUV, the featured guest leaving a party unfashionably early.

In her haste to depart, one hopes she took in some of the warm conditions surrounding her, metaphorically, but literally too. While the calendar said autumn was coming, it sure didn’t feel like it. □




Who Is

+ NFL

AA

RODGERS



THE MANY SIDES OF THE NFL'S BEST QUARTERBACK: HE'S FRIGHTENINGLY SMART, BUT WOULD RATHER LISTEN THAN TALK. HE SHIES FROM FAME, BUT DATES A CELEBRITY. HE'S ONE OF THE GUYS IN GREEN BAY, BUT ALSO THE BOSS. AND HE'S PRETTY CHILL, BUT HE REMEMBERS EVERY SLIGHT ... AND THAT'S WHY HE'S CONSTANTLY IMPROVING

BY GREG BISHOP Photograph by **AJ Mast** for Sports Illustrated

AARON. SPACE

On Sunday, A-Rod continued his mission to single-handedly take down his NFC North rivals: Green Bay's 31-23 victory marked Rodgers's 10th win in his last 12 games against the Bears.

ROD ELLS?



BEFORE MARK KELLY appeared on *Celebrity Jeopardy!* in May, his twin brother, Scott, compiled a scouting report for him. From space. As in, low-earth orbit. As in, aboard NASA's International Space Station. It didn't take Scott long to conclude that his brother faced a formidable opponent. So he called Mark from about 250 miles above the earth and said, "Aaron Rodgers did better on his SATs than you did."

Mark Kelly—astronaut, engineer, author and Navy captain—just laughed. He held no pretense about Rodgers, whose girlfriend, the actress Olivia Munn, had introduced the two men over drinks. At that point Kelly knew Rodgers only as the Packers' quarterback, Brett Favre's successor, Super Bowl champion and star of those Discount Double Check commercials. Then, Mark Kelly says, "he asked me about astrophysics."

One off-season, for fun, Rodgers—thrower of touchdowns, seeker of truths—read *Earthing*, a book that explains how the physical disconnect between human beings and nature (mainly because of things like shoes and beds) contributes to inflammation, pain, fatigue, stress and poor sleep.

Or something. Teammates reacted as could reasonably be expected: *Nerd alert*.

Anyway, Rodgers, Kelly and *Shark Tank* star Kevin O'Leary arrived on set for a *Jeopardy!* practice run, which is basically the same as the televised show, minus host Alex Trebek. The results don't count, but Rodgers wanted to win. . . . Actually, he didn't just want to win—he *needed* to win. He knew everything about the show's format, and so he clarified the rules when his opponents were unclear. The dry run confirmed Kelly's biggest threat: *Who is Aaron Rodgers?*

On the show, Rodgers dominated. He cruised through the "Number 12" category and conquered "Bible MVPs." He threw only one game-show interception, on a Daily Double, citing Steve Wozniak as the cofounder of IBM rather than Apple. He won \$50,000 for his charity, Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer, and then retired, with Kelly and Munn, to dinner. That's where Kelly maintained, as

he does now, that Rodgers's victory "came down to intelligence and reflexes," an ability to process information and click the buzzer fastest—his explanation not unlike the film-room defense of a hapless cornerback who found himself on the wrong side of a Rodgers quick slant.

Teammates can relate. They describe Rodgers, 31, as a history buff and conspiracy theorist, the guy who walks by debates and interrupts them, the quarterback who needed just two days to memorize a college playbook. Some people around him, like Packers coach Mike McCarthy, wonder if Rodgers has a photographic memory. He can recall specific plays from games in high school, down to the exact formation and result. Or remember a particular round of golf from years ago—like the one in which Green Bay fullback John Kuhn talked during Rodgers's backswing. Kuhn, one of Rodgers's best friends, is now the talk-during-the-backswing guy. (He also, according to Rodgers, cheats at cribbage.)

Rodgers has always been this way. At Pleasant Valley High in Chico, Calif., he would stop each morning in the fall at the classroom of his baseball coach, Ron Souza. The topic of conversation—the 49ers, the closest thing to a home team—never changed. Rodgers knew the disguises their opponents used, the blitzes, the offense's audibles, and he would diagram all of that from memory. He was 15. "Most of us are concrete learners," says Souza. "Aaron's not. He sees something one time, and he can recognize it."

Or, as Packers guard Josh Sitton puts it, "he's smart to the point where he's kind of annoying."

AS THE PACKERS prepped for their 2015 opener against the Bears, their quarterback tried to remain normal. Normal being relative, of course. It's hard to be ordinary when you're dating a Hollywood actress and outsmarting a renowned astronaut and chasing both a second Super Bowl ring and the best quarterbacks in NFL history. But that's Rodgers. He wants to stand out *and* blend in.

Rodgers's final line on Sunday reflected an almost perfect afternoon, his performance typical—which is to say clinical, deadly, efficient. Rodgers attempted only 23 passes in a 31–23 victory, but he completed 18 throws for 189 yards and three TDs, with a passer rating of 140.5. That despite losing his best receiver, Jordy Nelson, to a torn ACL in August, and despite this being his first game under a new play-caller, coordinator Tom Clements. Rodgers did that with a little help from an old friend in a familiar jersey, number 89.

A free-agent departee from Green Bay in 2014,



PACK MENTALITY

After going from Favre's backup (above) to Super Bowl MVP (middle, with Matthews), Rodgers's next step is bouncing back from a tough loss to Seattle last postseason (far right).

receiver James Jones returned on Sept. 7 after being released first by the Raiders and then, two weeks ago, by the Giants. Each time, Rodgers was one of the first people Jones texted. When last week Jones walked into the locker room he called home from '07 through '13, he received a hug from his old quarterback. "Welcome back," Rodgers said.

That's all Rodgers needed to convey. Under his leadership, the Packers' offense has never relied on one dominant target. Nelson and Randall Cobb each caught 90-plus balls last year. Greg Jennings departed for Minnesota in 2013 with 425 receptions as a Packer—*best of luck*. Jones caught 73 balls for the Raiders last year—*good for him*. Green Bay doesn't stop. This offense is like a Wisconsin winter: It's coming. No exceptions. Bundle up. "New, old, big, tall. . . . You know he's throwing," says Jones. "That makes your job easier. Just catch it."

So there was Jones on Sunday, already in the receiver rotation six days into his return. He caught the Packers' first touchdown of the season, plus the one that put Green Bay ahead for good.

Afterward, as reporters crowded around Jones's space in the cramped Soldier Field locker room, there were so many microphones and cameras and bodies that Rodgers couldn't get to his bags, which sat

“Innovate and evolve,” says Rodgers. “It can’t be Groundhog Day. I can’t be Bill Murray. I’d go as crazy as he did.”



behind the receiver. So Rodgers stood there with a towel draped around his waist, soaking it all in. Then he retreated toward the showers, allowing Jones his moment. Later, Rodgers entered his press conference wearing a leather jacket and jeans. His final statement provided a window into how his brain works: He knew that Sunday’s victory brought Green Bay within one win (at 92-93-6) of tying up the all-time series between two of the NFL’s longest rivals.

Even at the lectern, Rodgers still had all the answers.

FOR RODGERS, the search—for knowledge, for insight, for the smallest advantage—never ends. That’s why he called up Angelo Poli in February 2011, about two weeks after he was named MVP of Super Bowl XLV, when most of the NFL was retreating to the Caribbean.

Poli runs Whole Body Fitness in Chico, sharing office space with Rodgers’s father, Ed, a chiropractor. The NFL Players Association was about to go on strike, and Rodgers sensed an opportunity. He wanted to use the downtime to improve his nutrition and posture. He also wanted six-pack abs.

Rodgers underwent testing for his metabolic profile, a breakdown of how he ate and ran and sat, and

how all that impacted his performance. “That was the first time I really thought about how nutrition affected my workouts,” Rodgers says. “I knew it affected my energy and the way I looked in the mirror. But it also affects how you play.”

Rodgers was not like that in college. He still remembers Sundays during his sophomore year at Cal, when with whatever cash he had left on his meal card he bought a box of Lucky Charms and a carton of milk to survive until his card was replenished.

Poli put together a nutrition plan: six meals a day, all lean proteins (chicken, fish) and slow-burning carbohydrates (brown rice, sweet potatoes) and quality fats (olive oil, avocados). Rodgers started taking multivitamins. He stopped eating steaks and starches the night before games. He tried to contain his sweet tooth. He still does.

Rodgers needed challenges, Poli says, “like nobody I’ve ever worked with.” The trainer taped potato chips to the quarterback’s heels, forcing him to remain on his toes during drills. He had Rodgers throw at a net affixed to a moving motorcycle in order to improve timing. He had him hurl footballs while running on a treadmill or perform footwork drills while tossing at a laser beam that Poli moved around. “Most athletes have good coordination,” Poli says. “But Aaron can manage, calculate and strategize multiple things at once.”

When word reached Chico that Rodgers would compete with Kelly on *Jeopardy!*, Poli and his wife had the same reaction: *That poor astronaut.*

The season after he started working with Poli, Rodgers won the first of his two MVP awards. (He won again last year.) But that didn’t end his quest. He watched documentaries, like *Food Matters*, about nutrition. He sampled vegan restaurants and limited his coffee intake. He changed his sleep habits, aiming for at least eight hours a night. He tried P90X and Insanity workouts, and while once he figured he would retire in his mid-30s, he now says, “Nutrition and flexibility are things that will keep me playing at a high level into my 40s.”

Then, two summers ago, when he was living in Hollywood, Rodgers visited Ryan Capretta at Proactive Sports Performance in Westlake Village. He breezed past the oversized tires near the entrance and the framed jerseys (Emmitt Smith, Dwight Freeney) on the wall. He came alone. “He sat down on a couch,” Capretta recalls, and “I thought he was a dad—one of the high school kids’ parents. He didn’t say anything. Eventually I’m like, Oh, that’s Aaron Rodgers; I should go say hello.”

Together they added to Rodgers’s regimen, incorporating yoga and Pilates and boxing. Rodgers ran

Out to eat at Red Robin, a woman in a Packers jersey approached Rodgers and bowed. "You're making me uncomfortable," he told her.

sand dunes and traversed the famous Santa Monica stairs. Capretta had to pull Rodgers out of some drills; the QB wanted to lift with the linemen, run with the cornerbacks. "Physically, he was better than I thought," says Capretta. "Just pure strength, agility and speed. He was hanging with a lot of the skill guys."

This off-season Capretta wondered how the calf injury that had sabotaged Rodgers in last season's playoffs would impact their training. He eased Rodgers into some drills, like sprints, but, he says, "Aaron didn't want to limit anything." They even teased each other about the injury.

Rodgers: "We need to incorporate more calf raises into the off-season program."

Capretta: "We need to get more sessions in the gym than on the golf course."

"It's all about the challenge," says Rodgers. "Innovate and evolve and stay on top for a while. It can't be *Groundhog Day*. I can't be Bill Murray. I'd go as crazy as he did in that movie."

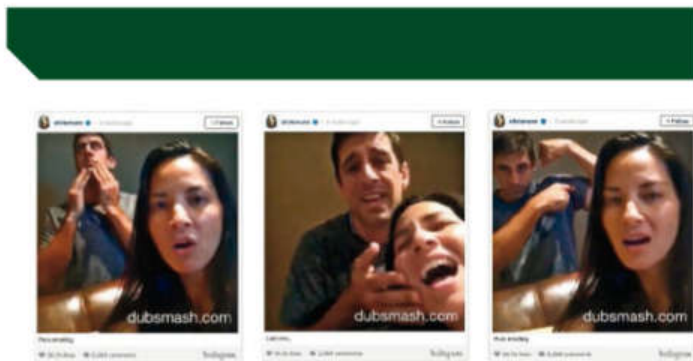
Asked what else he did this off-season, Rodgers declines to elaborate. He's private like that.

"Can't say," he says. Twice.

"I'll talk about it next year."

IT'S LATE AUGUST, two days after the Packers lost Nelson for the season. Rodgers isn't happy, but there's little time to stew. Fans pack the bleachers at the practice field, grill brats in the nearby parking lots and pump Journey's "Don't Stop Believin'." Rodgers's number 12 jersey outnumbers all the others in the stands combined, and by a good margin. That's his name fans are screaming. That's his autograph they seek, his hand they want to touch.

It wasn't always like this. When Green Bay selected Rodgers in the first round of the 2005 draft, Favre was still the King of Wisconsin, the graybeard-folk-hero quarterback. Rodgers, says former teammate Ruvell Martin, "was a regular guy, just like everybody else." Back then Rodgers could fly to receiver Terrence Murphy's wedding in the Virgin Islands and not worry about autograph requests. He could take one former coach, Butte (Calif.) College's Craig Rigsbee, to the Red Robin in Green Bay for dinner and not be noticed. His fellow rookies, Murphy says,



teased Rodgers about his shoes. Murphy can't remember what kind they were, just that they were so . . . normal. "We didn't do anything except for Red Robin and the movies," says Murphy. "We were boring."

Rigsbee returned to Green Bay in 2009, Rodgers's first Pro Bowl season, and the QB told him, "I can't do anything. I can't go anywhere." They tried to eat out anyway. A woman in a Packers jersey approached Rodgers and bowed. "You're making me uncomfortable," Rigsbee says Rodgers told her.

As Rodgers progressed from backup to starter to star to, arguably, the single best player in the league, friends say he tried to manage how much of himself he revealed to the public. It wasn't easy. On one hand: appearances, fame, the thousands of times he scribbled his name on everything from jerseys to body parts—that was all part of the gig. On the other: Rodgers never wanted the kind of attention that suffocates celebrities.

Back in Green Bay, practice ends and Rodgers settles at his locker for an interview. He doesn't want his family to participate in an SI story, doesn't want writers poking around Chico and doesn't want Munn (who hilariously told Conan O'Brien that she mistook Rodgers for a college football player the first time they met) to be interviewed. Rodgers carries a bin of mail but sets it carefully aside so as not to reveal its contents. Everything about his interaction with a reporter is calculated. He says he wants his teammates to see him conduct interviews the same way they do. He's one of them, he says. One of 53.

Those teammates say it's revealing the way Rodgers comports himself, revealing in how little he reveals.



Check out
TheMMQB.com's
NFL podcast
each week with
Andy Benoit and
Robert Klemko
at **SI.com/
podcasts**



He's among the NFL's highest-paid quarterbacks (five years, \$110 million) but not one of sports' top endorsers. (He ranked 27th, according to Opendorse.com, among athletes in 2014.) He doesn't have an entourage, an extensive car collection or a history of outrageous quotes.

(When he told Packers fans to "relax" after a poor start last season, that was considered vocal.) "I don't think he's afraid of the spotlight," says Packers general manager Ted Thompson. "But he doesn't crave it."

Among the players Rodgers rolls with, his crew includes Green Bay's fullback (Kuhn), long snapper (Brett Goode) and a backup linebacker from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Andy Mulumba). Rodgers studies the Packers' rookies, where they came from. He knows everyone's birthday. He teases Goode for being image conscious when Goode changes his hairstyle or trims his beard.

When Mulumba met Rodgers, in 2013, the linebacker's hands shook as he introduced himself. But he noticed that Rodgers was wearing a T-shirt touting the Enough Project, a D.C. nonprofit that fights genocide and crimes against humanity in the Congo, and afterward Rodgers visited Mulumba's apartment to meet his parents. Over chicken and plantains Rodgers asked a million questions. Later he invited



CLUED IN

Teammates are wowed by Rodgers's attempts to expand his mind (on *Jeopardy!*), body (at Proactive) and public persona (on Instagram, with Munn).

Mulumba to a birthday dinner at his house. Munn, Mulumba says, cooked rice, beef and green beans. His review: delicious.

That's also Rodgers, football's all-inclusive quarterback. Broncos linebacker Von Miller works out with Capretta in the off-season, and after sessions, groups of players stop at a gas station down the street. "The attendant in there loves Aaron," says Miller. "It's like he works there. Like he's one of the employees."

Exposing enough of himself not to seem reclusive, being both one of the guys and the boss—on this Rodgers says, "Hopefully *normal* means relatable. There's no formula for it." His answer reveals little.

Rodgers keeps in contact with a small circle of friends from high school. He tells teammates he likes to vacation outside the U.S. because he can walk around unnoticed. He controls what he can. And yet he's more open in person than expected. He's personable, sarcastic, funny, quick with specifics and anecdotes, heavy on eye contact. Basically, a normal dude.

"Hey," says linebacker Clay Matthews, "why don't you just put CHOSEN ONE on the story and put it out there." He laughs. "Oh, right. That was Russell Wilson in *Rolling Stone*."

The implication hangs there: That's not how Rodgers operates.

EVEN THE most competitive people in an industry as ruthless as pro football find that Rodgers—how desperately he wants to win, how seriously he hates to lose—can be a little much. Like the time he played basketball against Matthews and his brothers at the Pro Bowl and, after losing, punted the ball so far that, Matthews quips, "we couldn't even find it. Lost in the Florida sun."

"Aaron wants to step on your throat," says Matthews, who (seemingly) means this as a compliment.

There was also the time, seven years ago, when Martin and Rodgers traveled around Alaska, meeting with troops and discussing their Christian faith. They were in the gym, and a few kids around age 15 challenged them to a game of basketball. This was before Rodgers was a starter; the teenagers had no idea who he was. One of the kids blocked Rodgers's shot, then swatted away a second attempt. Martin could see the frustration building in Rodgers, who then backed down the teenager, elbowed his way inside and scored. "We're dying laughing," says Martin. "We're like: *Aaron, come on, man.*"

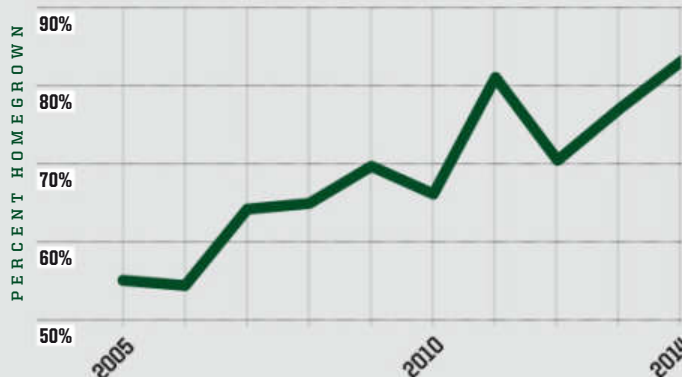
So many stories go like this. The time the Packers played dodgeball and Rodgers pelted teammates without mercy. The time he played a charity event with pro golfer Jerry Kelly and insisted they keep

What a Bunch of Homers

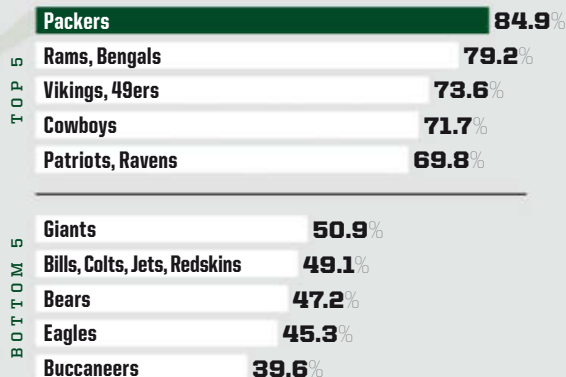
If you had to attribute the Packers' success over the past 10 years—98 wins, fourth most in the NFL—to one person, Aaron Rodgers would be your man. But if you allow for two names, then general manager Ted Thompson deserves nearly as much credit. Thompson's trick: He's won with a unique philosophy predicated on eschewing free agency and the trade market while retaining homegrown talent like Rodgers (his first-ever draft pick, in 2005) and receiver Randall Cobb, a 2011 draftee who re-signed for \$40 million this off-season. Not only do his Packers lead the league in homegrown players—they're relying on them more and more every year. —Ben Baskin



Green Bay: The Thompson Era



Homegrown across the NFL, 2015



score. The golf clubs he has tossed. The card tables he has slammed. The QB competitions—who can come closest to the pylon, who can hit the goalpost, who knows the most about Eastern European geography.

Rodgers spent three seasons behind Favre, from 2005 through '07, and lit up the starting D in Saturday walkthroughs, throwing no-look passes and deep TDs when defenders wanted nothing but to rest their legs. He celebrated afterward, even when his coach at the time, Mike Sherman, sent word for him to tone it down.

Meanwhile, Rodgers never misses an opportunity to remind someone, anyone, of a slight. He kept all his rejection letters from college. He reminds McCarthy in some way every season that the coach, then with the 49ers, drafted Alex Smith (now with the Chiefs) ahead of him in 2005. "We play Kansas City in Week 3," says McCarthy. "We won't make it through the first half of that week without him saying something. I'm certain."

Sensitive is a word that teammates often use to describe Rodgers. Sensitive about his height, 6' 2". Sensitive about his circuitous path to the pros (even if it might not seem that circuitous to others). These teammates are sensitive, even, in describing their QB's sensitivity, because that in and of itself is a sensitive matter. "He

pays attention to everything," says Jennings, now with the Dolphins. "He remembers, and he's going to burn you. And when the microphone is on, he's going to subtly share some facetious statement that lets you know that he knows what you said and that he got the best of it."

"No examples," says Packers tackle Bryan Bulaga. "If he did forget, there's no need to remind him."

"Sometimes," Jennings says, "it's like: *Aaron, come on, man*. He holds on to things longer than you would hope. He definitely has the mind-set of being slighted. He may have to look in the mirror and say, *Maybe everybody isn't [slighting] me anymore*."

THE BASICS of Rodgers's story are so worn that they form something of an origin myth. Zero Division I scholarship offers out of high school; one year at Butte, a community college; then a chance encounter with Cal coach Jeff Tedford, who was recruiting a tight end and spotted a skinny QB with a big arm instead. "Pretty crazy," Tedford says of that chance run-in. "He might go down as the best quarterback in the history of football."

Then, the 2005 draft. Thompson monitored which teams needed QBs, and when the 49ers took Smith

GROW + GIVE + MOVE

MOVEMBER



MOVEMBER.COM
Sign Up 

with the first pick, he thought Rodgers might slide all the way to Green Bay at No. 24. As Rodgers tumbled, Thompson felt like a pitcher late in a no-hitter: His scouts kept looking at him, but he wouldn't say whom he wanted. After 23 picks he finally informed Sherman of the plan: Rodgers. Rigsbee sent Rodgers a text message. "Best thing that ever happened to you."

He was right. The Packers helped Rodgers correct a minor hitch in his throwing motion—he held the ball too high, above his ear, according to former Packers QB Don Majkowski. The rest is legend: the Dallas game in 2007 when Rodgers relieved an injured Favre and threw for 201 yards; Favre's first retirement, in March '08; Favre's first un-retirement, four months later; Favre's trade to the Jets that August; the fans that booed Rodgers and chanted, "We want Brett!" Mark Murphy, the Packers' president then and now, says Rodgers stepped into "a situation as difficult as any in league history."

Rodgers at first focused on building relationships with his teammates. He hosted catered dinners at his house each Wednesday with different themes—Mexican one week, Italian the next, barbecue after that. "I wanted guys to know I was available," he says.

The Packers finished 6–10 in 2008, Rodgers's first season at the helm, but they've made the playoffs every year since, including four straight division titles. "It's been amazing to watch the transformation in this locker room," says Rodgers, "because there was a time when it was not as connected. Where guys didn't hang out. Guys didn't enjoy each other's company. When that changed, we started to believe we're going to win every game."

The Packers won the Super Bowl following the 2010 season. They went 15–1 the next year but were upset in the divisional playoff round. They fell in the NFC title game last season, but only after a miraculous Seahawks comeback. That's three times in five years where they were *this close* to a championship. In the NFL, that's as consistent as it gets. And that's Rodgers: consistent. In the second game of that Super Bowl season, against the Falcons, Rodgers completed 31 of 36 passes and threw three TDs, zero INTs. The Packers prevailed 48–21. "He was perfect that day," says Majkowski. "And he's pretty much been that way ever since."

EVERYONE AGREES on one thing about Rodgers that can never be described as normal: his skill set. Packers quarterback coach Alex Van Pelt jokes that his primary job is to make sure Rodgers wakes up on game day. "It's the toughest position in sports to play," says Tedford. "He makes it look easy. So effortless. So in control."



BEAR DOWN

Since he took over as a starter, in 2008, Rodgers leads the NFL in passer rating (106.8), touchdown percentage (6.6) and TD-to-INT ratio (4.07).

There isn't one specific thing that most separates Rodgers from his peers; rather, it's the totality of his talents. McCarthy breaks it down thusly: Rodgers can throw from the pocket and on the run; with his feet set or moving; and on short, intermediate and long drops. There's no pass he can't make, no window too small, no defense too confusing. In recent seasons he's become more careful; of his five interceptions last year, four hit his receivers in the hands. "He doesn't throw picks," says McCarthy. "There are reasons why."

For Joe Whitt Jr., Green Bay's defensive backs coach, those reasons include Rodgers's ability to control defenders with his eyes. He makes more no-look passes than most NBA point guards. For free-agent QB Matt Blanchard—who spent this summer with the Packers—it's about Rodgers's footwork (his mother, Darla, was a dancer), the plays he extends, the way he's never off balance. For Clements, the coordinator, it's Rodgers's rapid-fire release. "He's a classic thrower," says McCarthy. "Long arms, big hands, flawless mechanics."

They could all go on. And they do. What's most telling is the number of teammates—10, roughly—who admit they steal glances at the jumbotron to catch Rodgers's highlights in real time. They're still surprised by the QB, despite the MVPs and the volume of eye-popping statistics. Clements says Rodgers wows him at least once a day. "You get bored," he says. "Well, not *bored*, but you get used to him making throws you've never seen before."

TEAMMATES WATCHED this summer with increasing amusement and wonder as Munn posted a series of Instagram videos costarring Rodgers. The couple swung swords, lip-synced to Mariah Carey and Boyz II Men, and reenacted dialogue from *The*

Sports Illustrated

The M M | Q B

ALL NFL. ALL THE TIME.

GO DEEP EVERY DAY WITH MUST-SEE STORIES AND VIDEO
FROM OUR NFL EXPERT PETER KING

And His Staff of Award-Winning Journalists

THEMMQB.COM

OFFICIAL PARTNERS

Finish Line

State Farm



Princess Bride. This was the Rodgers friends have always known, suddenly available for public consumption. “I just shook my head,” says Matthews. “Not what I expected.”

Some Packers think the videos speak to another step in Rodgers’s evolution. Tackle David Bakhtiari points out that Rodgers became more vocal in his leadership last season. He seemed more comfortable in his interactions with the entire locker room.

Teammates think all of that speaks to a growing public comfort level for Rodgers. They think it’s fair to speculate about the root of that—and they think it is Munn. “She’s a big influence in his life,” says Cobb.

Then again, the Packers can never be exactly sure how comfortable their quarterback is. “If you ask him, everything is bugged,” says Kuhn. “Everybody’s out to get him. But you can never tell when he’s serious or when he’s joking. He could be messing with us. We’d never know.”

What matters, what has always mattered, is bringing another title to Titledown. Rodgers hasn’t talked much about the NFC championship game disaster against Seattle, the 12-point lead that evaporated in barely two minutes of the fourth quarter, the calf injury that impacted his ability to move. He won’t make excuses now. But of course it stung. And of course he believes the Packers would have won if he was healthy. He’s just not going to say that.

But now you can add that defeat to what drives Rodgers. “Right now he’s arguably the best quarterback in the NFL, but he’s not arguably the best ever,” says Matthews. “He’s well on his way. But we need to get back and finish this time. And whether I like to admit it or not, this is an offensive team. It starts with him.”

Souza, his old high school coach, watches Rodgers and can still tell by his facial expressions exactly what he’s thinking. “No facade,” Souza says. “No phony. He’s still a country bumpkin.” Which brings Souza to his favorite Rodgers story. Just before the 2005 draft an NFL GM—he won’t say which—called. The GM started pushing: What’s the story? Drugs? Alcohol? Booze? Family? None of the above, Souza answered. But the GM pushed some more. “Guys like this don’t fall out of the sky,” Souza recalls him saying.

Just ask the astronaut, who spent a fair amount of time up there. Mark Kelly can attest to Rodgers’s best skill, his greatest contradiction: He stands out while he blends in. Everyone knows how good Rodgers is. What they don’t know is how he got that way. That’s the trick, the magician’s sleight of hand. Rodgers is normal. . . . Until he isn’t. □



EASY MARCUS

Mariota's miracle: throwing more touchdowns in his first pro game (four) than he did incompletions (three).



WHEN THE LEAGUE'S TOP TWO NEW QBs—**MARCUS MARIOTA** AND **JAMEIS WINSTON**—MET, ONE WAS CLEARLY PREPARED FOR THE PROS AND THE OTHER, NOT SO MUCH. YOU WOULDN'T HAVE PREDICTED WHICH WAS WHICH

BY GREG A. BEDARD

Photograph by Kim Klement/USA TODAY Sports



HEADING INTO April's draft, the book on the top two quarterbacks, Jameis Winston and Marcus Mariota, was that Winston, due to his experience in Jimbo Fisher's pro-style Florida State system, was the most pro-ready QB since Andrew Luck. Mariota, many thought, would need time—years?—to get up to speed at the next level after mastering Oregon's spread scheme.

In scouting the two players last year, both in person and during extensive film review, I had little doubt that Winston was the more well-prepared for the NFL. He operated an offense that was very similar to that of most pro systems. And he did so with great comfort and skill. (Of course, he was playing on a talent-laden roster, something the Buccaneers—2–14 last season—lacked.) But I was most dazzled by Mariota's potential, especially if the NFL team that chose him did the smart thing and adopted more spread-offense staples. I thought Mariota, because of his keen mind and rare athletic skill set, was being limited by Oregon's offense and was capable of directing a much more complicated scheme. I believed he would make a much better transition to the NFL than most college spread quarterbacks.

Still, I couldn't have envisioned a debut like this.

With Winston watching from the opposite sideline in the first-ever opening-game matchup between rookie quarterbacks who'd been drafted No. 1 and No. 2, Mariota had the best passing debut in NFL history. In leading the Titans to a 42–14 victory at Raymond James Stadium, he completed 13 of 16 passes for 209 yards and four TDs, adding up to a perfect 158.3 passer rating. Not since Fran Tarkenton launched his Hall of Fame career 54 years ago has the league seen a QB debut like this. Tarkenton tossed four TDs as well, but his final score came in the fourth quarter; Mariota had his quartet (each to a different receiver) by the end of the first half, when the Titans led 35–7 and Winston's Buccaneers were leaving the field to boos.

“Hopefully we’ll clean up some of our mistakes.”

TITANS COACH Ken Whisenhunt wasn’t specifically addressing Mariota in his postgame press conference when he made clear there was room for improvement, but he might as well have been.

For an NFL quarterback the difference between competency and perfection is often an eye movement here or proper foot placement there. And Mariota didn’t exactly come charging out of the gate. Tennessee ran a nice, safe play after Sunday’s opening kickoff, a naked bootleg pass in the right flat to get the rookie’s feet wet. But Buccaneers linebacker Danny Lansanah didn’t fall for the run-action fake, and he was steaming toward Mariota as the QB released a poor pass, high and behind running back Bishop Sankey, who couldn’t haul it in. A better defense easily could have batted around and intercepted the ball.

Two plays later, though, on third-and-10 from the Titans’ 26, with the crowd in a frenzy and Tampa Bay showing blitz—two linebackers threatening the A gap



on either side of the center; just one would ultimately rush—Mariota calmly stepped up in the pocket and made the kind of tough throw that many critics said he hadn’t shown enough of in college: a 22-yard dart across the middle (just over All-Pro linebacker Lavonte David and away from charging corner Sterling Moore) to tight end Delanie Walker. “He did a lot of things that people questioned he could do, like throw from the pocket,” Whisenhunt said afterward. “That first third down—that was a big play.”

The Titans didn’t draft Mariota just to completely reprogram him, though, and on the next play Whisenhunt lifted straight from the Oregon playbook. The QB rode a handoff to running back Dexter McCluster and, as soon as the Bucs’ linebackers bit on the run

FIRST CRACK

Winston’s debut started with a whimper: a soft pass (above, left) that Sensabaugh took to the house for a 14-0 Titans lead.

fake, quickly tossed to receiver Kendall Wright on a backside slant. The receiver snaked through both safeties for a 52-yard touchdown.

Winston’s unveiling was less promising. Starting from his 20, he faced a manageable third-and-three, just the way the Bucs had drawn it up after two Doug Martin runs. The Titans brought no exotic coverage or blitz on the play, just straight man coverage underneath two deep safeties. Winston took the shotgun snap, looked at covered tight end Austin Seferian-Jenkins and wisely decided to throw short left to outlet receiver Adam Humphries. But Winston didn’t see cornerback Coty Sensabaugh undercutting the route and, under pressure, he threw a soft pass that Sensabaugh turned into a pick-six. “It was just a bad decision,” said Winston, who joined the likes of Brett Favre in having his first pro pass returned for a TD.

After staring down a receiver and nearly throwing an interception of his own on his next drive, Mariota converted another tough throw in the seam to Harry Douglas and then made amends for his opening lazy pass by executing the same bootleg to perfection, hitting Sankey in stride for a nearly untouched 12-yard score. With just over eight minutes of game time elapsed, the rout was on.

Whether it was because of the quick deficit or because he was pressured (hurried or knocked down) on each of his first three throws, Winston never



Launch Parties

The top five debuts by first-round QBs over the past decade

BY BROOKS KUBENA

DRAFT/PICK	QUARTERBACK PERFORMANCE	RESULT PASSER RATING
2015/2	Marcus Mariota TEN 13-16, 209 yds, 4 TDs, 0 INTs	42-14 over TB 158.3
2012/2	Robert Griffin III WAS 19-26, 320 yds, 2 TDs, 0 INTs	40-32 over NO 139.9
2008/3	Matt Ryan ATL 9-13, 161 yds, 1 TD, 0 INTs	34-21 over DET 137.0
2011/1	Cam Newton CAR 24-37, 422 yds, 2 TDs, 1 INT	21-28 to ARI 110.4
2013/16	EJ Manuel BUF 18-27, 150 yds, 2 TDs, 0 INTs	21-23 to NE 105.5

seemed to settle down. On his first unhurried pass, a six-yard out to Vincent Jackson with 3:49 remaining in the first quarter, he threw flat-footed to the left, just as he had on the interception. He botched a handoff to Martin two plays later and followed that up with a lucky 21-yard completion to Seferian-Jenkins that was both underthrown and deflected. He threw his first career touchdown (to a wide-open Seferian-Jenkins, against a busted coverage) to make it 21-7, but he hardly looked downfield before tucking the ball and running on both of his subsequent two drop-backs.

This was far from the in-command Winston we saw for much of two splendid seasons at Florida State. As a Seminole, Winston drew raves for his ability to stand in the pocket and allow plays to

develop even under intense pressure. There was little of that against the Titans, whose pass rush ranked just 21st in the league last season, according to Pro Football Focus. With two rookies starting on his line and without injured receiver Mike Evans, Winston never looked sure of himself.

That could lead some to wonder whether Winston will be able to deal with true adversity. It's a legitimate question; this Buccaneers team lacks talent in many areas and Winston will be faced with boatloads of hardship. But the answer won't be clear for some time. While the Titans aren't exactly the Seahawks on defense, legendary defensive schemer Dick LeBeau threw enough at Winston and the Bucs to keep them out of rhythm. "Our main thing was to show him different things, make him have to read the coverage," says veteran Titans safety Michael Griffin. "He did the best he could. I don't think he panicked or quit, which is a positive."

Indeed Winston settled as the game went on, throwing for twice as many yards in the second half, securing the ball and upping his passer rating from 56.2 to 85.4. "With time, he'll get better."

"It really couldn't have gone much better for us."

THAT WAS Whisenhunt, standing outside his locker room after the game as Mariota brushed by. The Titans couldn't have scripted a more successful debut for Mariota. Not only did they have the early 14-0 lead, which allowed Tennessee to stay with the ground game (twice as many rushes as passes, for 124 yards), but Mariota also faced a defensive scheme that sits on the endangered species list. The Buccaneers predominantly employ coach Lovie Smith's trademark Cover Two scheme, which can be effective with a talent-laden unit. But that calls for four down linemen who can consistently rush the passer, plus smart and fast safeties. Outside of defensive tackle Gerald McCoy, the Buccaneers don't have any of that. When a Cover Two defense can't generate constant pressure, the zone coverage behind it is easily picked apart by patient and accurate quarterbacks. In other words, this matchup was right up Mariota's alley.

We'll get a better idea of where Mariota is in his development over the next month, as the Titans take on two of the best football minds when it comes to affecting passers (the Browns' Mike Pettine and Rex Ryan of the Bills) plus a Dolphins team that features a formidable defensive line. Some of Mariota's con-



Check out SI's Audibles NFL podcast each week with Chris Burke and Doug Farrar at SI.com/podcasts

tinued issues—staring down receivers, not scanning the field for all of his options, throwing late—could become problematic in those games.

But, at least for one week, this was a big win for Mariota and the Titans' brass, who heard from a chorus of critics warning against drafting a spread quarterback that high in the draft. The Buccaneers were certainly in the large old-school group that echoed that sentiment. "Playing in a pro-style system

helped," Smith said of Winston in April after taking the QB No. 1. "We saw him in the same situations you'll see him in the NFL."

Sunday was only one game, and in the end it will be a mere footnote in the careers of both Winston and Mariota. But one of these quarterbacks sure looked ready for his debut. And it wasn't the top overall pick, the one who was thought to be, by far, the more pro-ready of the two. □

In a Rush

Two rookie running backs wasted no time laying the groundwork for—they hope—two great careers

BY ANDREW LAWRENCE



As the league's top rookie passers duelled in Tampa, another friendly rivalry was renewed between two top rookie rushers. On one sideline at San Diego's Qualcomm Stadium was the Chargers' Melvin Gordon (*above, right*). On the other was Ameer Abdullah (*above, left*) of the Lions. The pair first met in Myrtle Beach, S.C., as high school seniors, when they roomed together in the weeklong run-up to the 2011 Offense-Defense All-American Bowl all-star game. "I knew he would excel," Gordon said four days before San Diego rallied past Detroit for a 33-28 victory, "especially at this level."

Both backs were Big Ten standouts, with the 5' 9", 203-pound Abdullah rushing for more than 1,000 yards in three straight seasons at Nebraska, and the 6' 1", 215-pound Gordon gaining 2,587 yards as a Wisconsin senior in 2014—a single-season output second in FBS history to only Barry Sanders's 2,628 in 1988. Gordon's total included a 408-yard, four-TD performance against the Cornhuskers, in a game in which Abdullah ran for 69 yards.

On draft day Chargers GM Tom Telesco traded up to No. 15 to select Gordon and all but proclaimed him the second coming of LaDainian Tomlinson. But when Gordon—despite his LT-like work ethic in the weight room, in film study and on the field—struggled to find his footing during the preseason, averaging 2.3 yards

per carry in two games while nursing a right ankle sprain, panicked fans were ready to call him a lemon. Meanwhile, Abdullah, the 54th pick, was gaining 6.8 yards per run and earning comparisons with former Lion Sanders.

On Sunday, Abdullah rushed for a team-leading 50 yards on seven carries (the first went for a 24-yard touchdown), caught four passes, for 44 yards, and returned three kicks, for 105 yards. His early contributions helped the

Lions secure a 21-3 first-half lead and overshadowed his college rival's performance. Gordon's line, while an improvement over the preseason (14 carries, 51 yards), doesn't capture the ferocity with which he attacked the heart of Detroit's thick interior line. Nor does it account for a gyroscopic, 21-yard touchdown run that was formally logged as a seven-yard gain after officials whistled Gordon down on Detroit's 14-yard line as he was bent over and spinning away from a tackle by Lions safety Glover Quin. (Gordon's elbow apparently grazed the turf.)

Gordon also had a third-quarter fumble; such rookie mistakes necessitate that he be insulated within a rotation of proven veteran backs (Danny Woodhead, Donald Brown, Branden Oliver) until he becomes a 20-plus touch workhorse. Abdullah is similarly protected (by Joique Bell and Theo Riddick). Each rookie has the potential to break out in divisions—Abdullah in the NFC North, Gordon in the AFC West—that don't especially hang their helmets on run defense.

Abdullah and Gordon, naturally, have even loftier expectations for themselves. After the game the pair exchanged jerseys, looking more like backs in soccer than football. Abdullah was asked if he'd consider getting his Gordon jersey framed. "Of course," he said in the locker room afterward. "He could be one of the greats one day, man!" □

WE CAME. WE QUESTIONED. WE CREATED OUR BEST SUV YET.



The all-new, completely redesigned Tucson is the result of us asking question after question after question. Shouldn't an SUV have Hands-free Smart Liftgate to do the opening for you? Shouldn't it come with Lane Departure Warning? Shouldn't it watch your back with Blind Spot Detection? Our answer was a resounding 'yes' to all of the above.

 **HYUNDAI** Tucson

Optional features shown. The Smart Liftgate and Blind Spot Detection are standard on Sport and Limited trims. NEVER rely completely on Blind Spot Detection (BSD) and be sure to use proper lane changing procedures. BSD will not detect every object or vehicle and will not prevent accidents. Always look over your shoulder and use your mirrors to confirm clearance. Lane Departure Warning is optional on Limited trim. Lane Departure Warning operates above approximately 44 mph and only when the lane markings are clearly visible on the road. It will not prevent loss of control. Refer to your Owner's Manual for more information. Hyundai is a registered trademark of Hyundai Motor Company. All rights reserved. ©2015 Hyundai Motor America.

Left Behind

The importance (and income) of the left tackle position is based on an old NFL. It's time to adapt

BY ANDY BENOIT

IN THE FIRST half of the 2015 NFL season opener, Patriots left tackle Nate Solder was flagged twice for penalties and defeated several times by Steelers bull rushers. Funny timing, then, that New England had signed the 27-year-old to a two-year extension worth \$20.1 million only one day earlier. Factored in with his \$5.6 million salary this season, Solder is now, on average, the team's highest-paid player. On Thursday, thanks in part to injuries, the Patriots lined up a pair of rookies (fourth-round guard Tre' Jackson; undrafted center David Andrews) and an undrafted third-year guard (Josh Kline) to Solder's right, forming a three-man interior that collectively costs an average of \$1.7 million annually. Or 17% of Solder's haul.

New England's O-line was never an issue in a 28-21 victory over Pittsburgh—

Solder's struggles early on were offset by Tom Brady's pocket poise and quick throws—but one had to wonder: Why are the notoriously economical Pats paying a premium for a good-but-far-from-great left tackle?

The answer lies in the fact that it has become chic to say that the left tackle is the second-most-important position in football, behind only quarterback. This makes you sound smart. Open-minded. You're lauding the once-underappreciated 300-pounders who do the dirty work. But you're also just plain wrong.

Left tackles gained awareness and popularity 10 years ago, thanks largely to Michael Lewis's 2006 book, *The Blind Side*, which profiled a rising high school superstar, Michael Oher, and argued that his position, left tackle, was second in importance because it was crucial in *protecting* the most important position. Lewis's

point was keen and well-explained, and football fans rightfully bought in. So did NFL general managers, who in the subsequent decade made left tackle the game's second-highest-paid position.

But consider: Lewis's theory was based on an old NFL. He told his story through the prism of the 1980s, when the likes of Lawrence Taylor menaced quarterbacks who often lined up directly under center and took seven-step drop-backs. Thirty-odd years later, that QB spends 75% of his time in the shotgun, where he almost immediately has a much wider scope of vision; if he's righthanded, he sees the full right side of the field and almost all of the left. There is no "blind side" anymore. Yesterday's seven-step drops are now more like five-step drops, but most QBs don't even hold the ball that long. Quick strikes have become the norm; the best passers often throw in 2.5 seconds or less. Many times, even if a wide-aligned defensive end goes completely untouched by the left tackle, he still can't reach the QB in time.

More than ever, defenses generate pass-rushing pressure through disguised fronts, stunts, twists or blitzes—and most of those focus on isolating

and exploiting an O-line's weakest link. A solid left tackle is still valuable, but as a pass protector he's not much more valuable than any of his fellow O-linemen.

Perception holds that the left tackle's value is greatest when he spars one-on-one against an edge rusher in obvious passing situations (allowing the offense to scheme ways to help its right tackle, who is almost always athletically inferior to the defender he's blocking). But is that enough to make left tackle the second-highest-paid position in the game?

Pass-blocking is a totally reactive maneuver: You can't create anything, you can only prevent something bad from happening. And that makes the difference between a great pass block and an average one nominal. Both render the same result, a clean quarterback. A great catch or run, on the other hand, can create a significantly different outcome than an average catch or throw. You don't get these without sturdy pass protection, of course, but that makes pass protection, in essence, an insurance policy. And your insurance policy shouldn't cost nearly half as much as the thing it protects.

Of course, pass-blocking is only part of the equation. In

INTRODUCING THE OFFICIAL SUV OF THE NFL.

Optional features shown. Hyundai is a registered trademark of Hyundai Motor Company. All rights reserved. ©2015 Hyundai Motor America.

 **HYUNDAI** Tucson

**JOSH
KLINE**
LEFT GUARD
\$496,333
per year

**DAVID
ANDREWS**
CENTER
\$530,000
per year

**TRE'
JACKSON**
RIGHT GUARD
\$700,935
per year

**NATE
SOLDER**
LEFT TACKLE
\$10,031,000
per year

**SEBASTIAN
VOLLMER**
RIGHT TACKLE
\$4,187,500
per year



Average annual salaries based on current contract

OUT OF LINE

The way left tackles are valued, even an average talent like Solder (flagged on this play) makes big bucks.

the ground game, offensive linemen are aggressors. And as the Cowboys proved last season, the difference between average run blockers and great ones can be extraordinary. But the left tackle is rarely the crux of a run-blocking design. You can benefit on sweeps, pitches and misdirections if you're lucky enough to have an athletic left tackle who can play in space or on the perimeter. But

most gap-oriented run-blocking designs rely on pull-blocking guards, and outside-zone running is a collective front-five effort, often hinging on a center's quickness off the snap. Nowhere in this equation is the left tackle crucial enough to justify the assets that are currently being dedicated to his position.

Tellingly, recent Super Bowl winners haven't invested heavily in left tackles. While roughly 65% of today's NFL teams employ a former first-rounder at the position, only four of the past 14 champions did so. (Tarik Glenn for the 2006 Colts;

Bryant McKinnie for the '12 Ravens, and by then he was a veteran journeyman after being drafted by the Vikings; Russell Okung for the '13 Seahawks; and Nate Solder, who had a very up-and-down season for the '14 Patriots.) Other data suggest that standout left tackles don't translate to wins. Since '07, 15 out of 32 left tackles who were voted first- or second-team All-Pro have played for clubs with losing records. (To be fair, the Browns' Joe Thomas skews these numbers a bit.)

These are surface-level samplings, of course, but if we're talking about the

second-highest-paid position in the game, then even the surface level should look terrific. Super Bowls aren't being won with average quarterbacks—or even with average cornerbacks or pass rushers. Plus, All-Pros from those positions are reaching the postseason at a much higher rate.

It was once wise to invest heavily in left tackles. But in today's NFL—where balls are thrown quickly, quarterbacks are vigorously monitored for safety by officials and so many formations involve the shotgun—the smart money should go elsewhere. □

TIM CLAYTON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





OVER THE RAINBOWS

In Week 2, Miller had eight carries for 57 yards and two catches for 16 in a 38-0 win over Hawaii.



THREE OR FOUR nights a week this summer Ohio State junior quarterback Cardale Jones saw Braxton Miller's name pop up on his phone. Jones dragged himself out of bed, even when the texts arrived at 10 p.m., and made the 10-minute drive to the back entrance of the university's cavernous indoor football facility. A gate outside the Woody Hayes Athletic Center would mysteriously open, granting access to a garage door where Miller waited. Then Jones and Miller would drive in and park on the indoor field. By the time they exited their rides, the lights had been flipped on, Meek Mill blasted from the speakers and racks of footballs awaited. "I don't even know who he called," says Jones with a laugh, "to get the gate open and the music bumping."

The covert conversion of Miller from Heisman-caliber

+
COLLEGE
FOOTBALL

PLAY MAKER

Braxton Miller's move from QB to H-back was born out of necessity; his NFL stock, for one, was at stake. The inside look at the switch that spun college football on its head

BY PETE THAMEL

Photograph by
Andrew J. Weber for Sports Illustrated

BRAXTON MILLER

quarterback to Heisman-candidate wide receiver played out in Columbus between May and July. Only a handful of players and coaches knew Miller's intentions, since he worked out much as he'd spent the previous year and a half—in the shadows. Miller did ladder drills, and then for an hour or so Jones threw while Miller ran routes and caught over-the-shoulder passes. "There was no one here," Miller says with a grin, "except maybe a couple of custodians."

Two surgeries on his right shoulder forced the 6' 2", 215-pound Miller to miss the 2014 season and derailed his career as a QB. Despite being named the Big Ten MVP as a sophomore *and* as a junior, Miller faced an arduous fight for his old starting job this summer. His immediate replacement, sophomore J.T. Barrett, emerged as a star during the '14 regular season until he broke his right ankle against Michigan. Jones, who took over for Barrett, then led the Buckeyes to their eighth national championship. And Miller would have been battling from behind: The earliest he could have been medically cleared to throw was August.

For the 20 months between in-game appearances—from January 2014 to September '15—Miller confronted the loneliness of rehab, the uncertainty of his professional future and the helplessness of seeing his teammates win the title without him. Miller had always been a bit introverted and aloof, but the time away created something strength coach Mickey Marotti says he hadn't seen in the early part of Miller's career: a chip on his shoulder. "It was like the injury changed him into a new man," receiver Michael

THROW BACK

In 2013, Miller (throwing against Iowa) QB'd the Buckeyes to a 12-2 record with 2,094 passing yards, 1,068 rushing and 36 total touchdowns.



"IT WAS LIKE THE INJURY CHANGED HIM INTO A NEW MAN," RECEIVER MICHAEL THOMAS SAYS OF MILLER. "IT BROUGHT A DIFFERENT DEemeanOR OUT OF HIM."

Thomas says. "It brought a different demeanor out of him. It created a monster."

Miller first approached coach Urban Meyer about the switch in May, knowing that he needed to become a graduate-level receiver in one semester. He lost the 12 pounds he'd gained sitting out, learned the mano a mano gamesmanship of beating press coverage and studied film of similarly equipped receivers, like the Bills' Percy Harvin and the Rams' Tavon Austin. By the time he went public with the decision in late July, Miller already felt like a veteran. "I was so eager to get better at the position," Miller says. "I felt like I was behind. People have been doing this for years."

After Miller rescued the No. 1 Buckeyes with two third-quarter touchdowns in their come-from-behind 42-24 opening win at Virginia Tech on Sept. 7, Meyer called Miller to the front of the locker room. While Miller's spontaneous pirouette on a 53-yard touchdown run had immediately gone viral, Meyer praised him more for his resilience than his improvisation. Miller responded by breaking down in tears as a conga line of Buckeyes hugged him. "He was overwhelmed with satisfaction and humility, and he was so thankful that it finally happened," says receivers coach Zach Smith. "He wanted it so bad."

It marked the end of a nearly two-year journey during which Miller reshaped his career and identity.

THE MOST convoluted quarterback duel in college football began in January 2014, when Clemson defensive end Vic Beasley sacked Miller in the Orange Bowl. The hit injured Miller's shoulder, and he underwent labrum surgery before returning for training camp that August. He reinjured the shoulder throwing



a seven-yard out in practice and underwent a second surgery later that month.

No soothsayer could have predicted how events would unfold from there. Barrett went from unknown to indispensable, leading the Buckeyes to the cusp of the conference title. That allowed Jones to emerge as a third-string cult hero with victories in his first three starts—a 59–0 blowout of Wisconsin in the Big Ten title game and upsets of Alabama and Oregon in the College Football Playoff. The dazzling highlights showcasing Miller’s 4.3 speed faded from memory. By the time his teammates hoisted the trophy as the inaugural College Football Playoff champs, most people assumed Miller’s only option was a transfer.

“It was hard times,” Miller says. “J.T. was doing well, and people were saying they forgot about me. Then J.T. got hurt, and Cardale was doing good. Then they forgot about J.T.”

Miller says he heard rumors that he’d head to Alabama, LSU, Oregon and Florida State. (Barrett was supposedly going to Texas.) Fans tweeted him constant recruiting pitches. But Miller, who grew up in the Dayton area rooting for the Buckeyes, says he never considered leaving. When staff members would run the rumors by Miller, he would respond by rolling his eyes, shaking his head and reminding them of the giant script O tattoo that covers his left shoulder. “It’s kind of outrageous at times,” he says, reflecting on the rumors. “This

SPIN CYCLE

Miller, who has clocked a sub-4.4 time in the 40, turned heads with a 360° move during a 53-yard run against the Hokies.



up the conversation with Marotti. “What do you think,” Miller asked, “of me playing another position?”

T HE SPREAD OFFENSE that overtook college football in the 2000s can be traced back, in part, to No. 1 Nebraska’s 27–24 overtime win at Notre Dame in ’00.

In the locker room after the game, Fighting Irish receivers coach Urban Meyer hugged his inconsolable star, David Givens. The wideout had caught one pass for nine yards. “He wasn’t crying; he was sobbing,” Meyer said. “His whole thing was that he let the team down.”

Meyer had recruited Givens, the nation’s No. 1 prospect in 1998, and in the aftermath of the loss even he couldn’t explain why an athlete so gifted had touched the ball so seldom. The coach says that moment spawned an off-season visit to then Louisville offensive coordinator Scott Linehan, who ran a spread passing game, in a quest to find ways to better exploit his playmakers. “That’s the beginning,” Meyer says, “of our offense.”

The image of Givens prompted Meyer to start a game-day tradition



is my home state. Good fan base. They’ve treated me right since I’ve gotten here. My goal was to graduate and go to the NFL from Ohio State.”

Miller earned his degree in communications last December and still hopes to achieve the second half of his goal. Marotti recalls asking Miller what countless fans and pundits had wondered during his career: “Do you see yourself as an NFL quarterback?” Miller, as Marotti recalls, responded, “Well, yeah. I want to play in the NFL.”

No one ever questioned Miller’s running ability—in 2013 he set the school record for career rushing yards by a quarterback with 3,054—but he was unrefined as a passer. In his junior season, under then coordinator Tom Herman, Miller completed 63.5% of his passes, up from 54.1% as a freshman. But his shoulder injuries coincided with the NFL’s waning interest in dual-threat quarterbacks like Tim Tebow, Robert Griffin III and Colin Kaepernick. During a trip to Birmingham in the spring to get checked by Dr. James Andrews, Miller found out he still wasn’t ready to throw, but he was healthy enough to get back on the field. In Columbus he picked



he still maintains: On the morning of kickoff he pulls out a fresh folder he'll keep with him on the sideline and asks himself a simple question: *Who are my best players?* He lists those names on the folder.

Players such as Josh Harris (Bowling Green), Paris Warren (Utah) and Harvin (Florida) have had their names scribbled atop the folder over the years, and in an effort to get them the ball in space, Meyer has continued to add wrinkles. Stack the box, he'll hit a bubble screen. Double-team a star wideout, he'll run zone read. The playmakers' position doesn't matter. In years such as 2012, when the Buckeyes lacked perimeter options, the list was short. "Braxton was by far our best player," he says. "He had to run the ball 15 to 20 times for us to have a chance."

Meyer planned to ease Miller into action at his new H-back position, which allows him to line up everywhere from the slot to the backfield to under center. But with three receivers suspended for the Virginia Tech game for violating team rules (Jalin Marshall, Corey Smith and Dontre Wilson) and projected sophomore starter Noah Brown injured, Miller played 31 of 56 snaps. (He didn't return punts, which he's expected to do this season.) Miller touched the ball eight times, and his performance illuminated the advances in Meyer's offense over the past 15 years. Miller caught three passes for 79 yards and a touchdown, took four Wildcat snaps and got one handoff for 61 rushing yards. "Ridiculous," Meyer says of Miller's potential. "He's got very good ball skills. He's strong. So much of it is, How much can his body take?"

The opening weekend's defining highlight came when Miller reversed his field with a 360° spin past a pair of defenders, banishing them to GIF infamy. He also hauled in a 54-yard touchdown pass from Jones—the

OLD GUARD

Miller (5) was still wearing his old number and standing with his former backups Barrett (left) and Jones (12) during spring practice.

surprise starter—that included balletic footwork on the sideline to turn the corner. "Oh, for sure," Miller says when asked if he was eager to remind people of his talent. "I love football, especially when it's a prime-time game and the atmosphere is right. I want to put on a show."

Miller did that, ensuring himself another season on Meyer's manila folder.

SITTING AT a circular cafeteria table in Ohio State's football facility in August, Miller FaceTimes with his three-year-old son, Landon, while noshing on chicken tenders and macaroni and cheese. The conversation helps Miller emerge from the sleepy haze that follows an hourlong massage, a treatment to help achy legs unaccustomed to the physical pounding that comes with playing receiver. Miller says his new position requires as much sprinting in a single session—Marotti says up to six miles—as a week of practice at quarterback. As a result, Miller's hamstrings and groin muscles tightened up during camp. "I knew it was coming," Marotti says of Miller's issues. "I knew the amount of running was going to really be a shock."

What's impressed Buckeyes coaches most is Miller's aggressive effort to learn the technical part of the position. Smith, the cocksure 31-year-old receivers coach, has overseen the switch while graduate assistant Matt Merritt, 27, has served as something of a personal tutor. Meyer has tapped into his roots as a receivers coach, watching film regularly with Miller over the summer to talk about the nuances.

To succeed, Miller needed to learn the every-snap, Spy vs. Spy interplay between receiver and defensive back that quarterbacks are generally oblivious to. In high school, for example, a receiver leans outside to fake a corner route and set up an



Check out the SI College Football podcast each week for the latest analysis, buzz and breaking news at SI.com/podcasts

inside cut for a post route. In college receivers will trick the defensive back by leaning the way they're actually going—or not. "It's like reverse, reverse psychology," Smith says.

Good receivers line up with a plan to beat the defensive back on every snap, and the best use previous moves to set up a big shot downfield, such as running five corner routes on run plays to get the defensive back leaning outside, creating a clear path for a later post or slant.

Miller laughs at the little things he's needed to learn: A receiver on the right side of the ball stands with his left foot forward, and vice versa. The footwork is also intricate; a veteran receiver can run a go, out or slant and disguise the routes by taking the

same first three steps each time. "When they all look the same," says Buckeyes offensive coordinator Ed Warinner, "now you're winning."

Every night during camp, Barrett says, Miller would return to the hotel more than an hour after the rest of the team. He stayed at the facility to watch film and pepper Merritt and Smith with questions about how to run sharper patterns and block better. Miller has no plans to return to his old position, saying, "This is me."

"Now he's so into it, he doesn't know what to do with himself," Smith says. "He thinks it's the coolest thing in the world."

After 20 months of uncertainty and anonymity, Miller's future has gone from secret to secure. His new route appears wide open. □

A TRIO OF TIPS

Though it's not uncommon for a quarterback to shift to receiver in college or the NFL, there's no blueprint for the move either. Braxton Miller is off to a good start, but here are a few pointers from guys who have successfully made the switch **BY PETE THAMEL**



HINES WARD

A high school quarterback, he played tailback, QB and receiver at Georgia.

A receiver in the NFL, he earned four Pro Bowl nominations and Super Bowl XL MVP honors with the Steelers.

THE MAJOR issue for guys making that transition is getting separation when you get jammed at the line of scrimmage. I worked with Antwaan Randle El when he came to the Steelers in 2002 [Randle El played quarterback at Indiana], and one of his big transitions was getting off against man-to-man coverage. Then it's learning nuances, such as how to run a slant when the corner is playing inside technique. Miller will have to become a patient route runner and not force things—that's the biggest thing he'll have to learn.

A lot of colleges aren't asking receivers to read coverages. They look to the sideline [for a call] and run a route. That's a problem for a lot of rookies in the NFL. It takes two or three years to play relaxed and free.



BRAD SMITH

A four-year starter at quarterback for Missouri (2002 to '05), he switched

to receiver in the NFL and played with the Jets, Bills and Eagles. He's currently a free agent.

THE FIRST time I ran a passing route with the Jets was in an off-season rookie practice. It wasn't until year three that I really felt like I knew what I was doing. The first couple of years you are confident and making plays, but you don't know what's going on—you're kind of running around. Now when I get to the line of scrimmage, I have a plan to beat the guy in front of me. There are so many little things to learn. There's your stance and the distance between your feet. There's how to best come off the ball. Where do you put your hands? How do you use your first step? At first, some guys just naturally do things to get open and don't know the nuances. The Pro Bowlers are the guys who learn the small things.



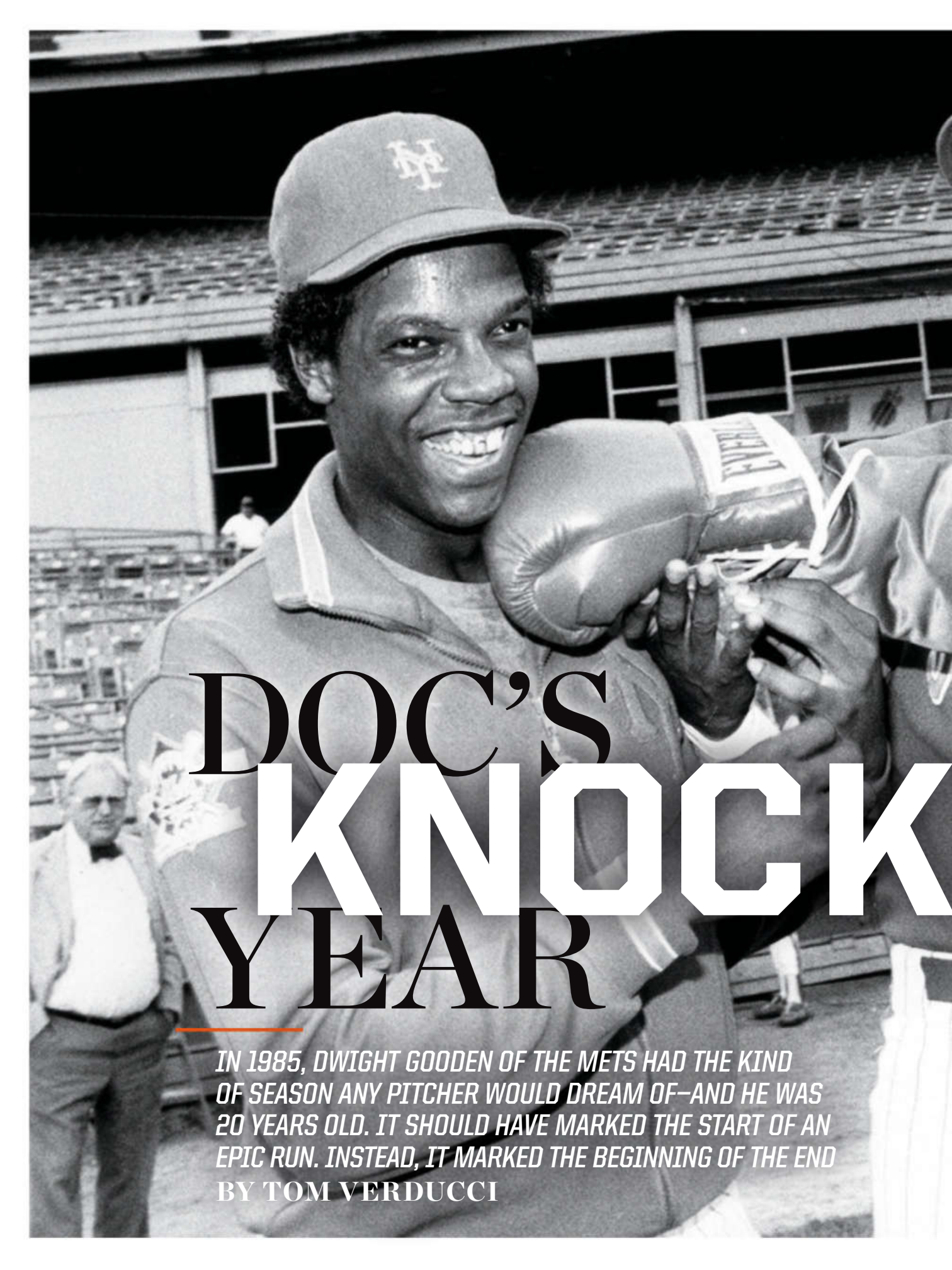
MATT JONES

A second-team All-SEC quarterback at Arkansas in 2004, Jones shifted to wide

receiver before the '05 draft, and the Jaguars picked him No. 21. He played in the NFL for four seasons.

I WAS in the best shape of my life when I switched, but I didn't understand the physical pounding your legs take from all the sprinting. I would recommend to Braxton to do yoga. You need to stretch constantly. My first two years I had hamstringing and groin problems.

I played basketball in the SEC against guys like David Lee [at Florida], Tayshaun Prince [Kentucky] and Brandon Bass [LSU], but I can tell you the best athletes in the world are defensive backs. They have a world-class athlete in front of them that they have to guard—and the receiver knows where he's going; the defensive back doesn't. For a receiver, working on timing with your quarterback and watching film with him helps you beat those elite athletes.



DOC'S KNOCK YEAR

IN 1985, DWIGHT GOODEN OF THE METS HAD THE KIND OF SEASON ANY PITCHER WOULD DREAM OF—AND HE WAS 20 YEARS OLD. IT SHOULD HAVE MARKED THE START OF AN EPIC RUN. INSTEAD, IT MARKED THE BEGINNING OF THE END
BY TOM VERDUCCI

CHIN MUSIC

His 1985 breakout made Gooden the talk of the town along with Mike Tyson, who a year later showed fellow title contenders and future bad boys Gooden (far left) and Darryl Strawberry how to deliver a strike.

Photograph by
Vincent Riehl/NY Daily News
Archive/Getty Images



OUT

D

DEFINING MAJESTY drives man to his literary boundaries. Ansel Adams defined Yosemite Valley as “a glitter of green and golden wonder in a vast edifice of stone and space.” Neil Armstrong, seeing Earth from afar, defined our planet as “that tiny pea, pretty and blue.”

The 1985 season of Dwight (Doc) Gooden, likewise, was so vastly impressive as to invite our most ambitious attempts at commemoration.

It is, by measure of his 1.53 ERA, the greatest season since the mound was lowered, in 1969. With his 24–4 record the righthanded Gooden became, at 20, the youngest 20-game winner in baseball history.

There is more. Gooden was removed from the mound mid-inning only twice all year—and never when trailing. He took the ball to the ninth inning 18 times in his 35 starts and finished the inning every time—while allowing a total of one run and only one extra-base hit (a double). In his four losses, his team scored all of one run while he was on the mound. He lost just once in his final 25 starts.

Still, we strive. For true appreciation there was his utter mastery of the Cubs, the defending National League East champions. Gooden started five times against the Cubs in 1985. He beat them every time, always pitching a complete game.

Veteran infielder Larry Bowa played on those '85 Cubs until he was released in August. A week later he signed with the Mets and could not wait to tell Gooden a secret. “Dwight,” Bowa said, “you’ve been tipping your pitches. Every time you throw a fastball you lift your [left] index finger off your glove, and every time you throw a curveball you keep your index finger on your glove.” That’s how good Gooden was in 1985: The Cubs knew what pitch was coming and still could not knock him out of a game, much less beat him.

Maybe this is even better: If New York gave him an early lead, Gooden privately would root for his own teammates to make outs—the quicker to get him back on the mound. When the Mets scored a second run with him in the game, Gooden went 21–0.

Maybe, though, it is best to leave commemoration to the artist and adventurer himself. “It was almost surreal, like an out-of-body experi-



JUST TWO GOOD

Using mainly a fastball and a curve—and goaded by the ultracompetitive

Carter (near left)—Gooden went 24–4 with a 1.53 ERA, the greatest season since the mound was lowered in 1969.

ence,” Gooden says. “Every game, I felt totally in control. I could put the ball where I wanted it. I could throw my curveball in any count. I knew how to set up

hitters. I knew how I wanted to attack.

“Each time I went to the mound I wanted to pitch a complete game, and I wanted 10 strikeouts. I knew there were extra fans in attendance, and they wanted to see a show. It was like a concert, and I was the main attraction.”

THE DELIRIOUS tumult that welled within Shea Stadium in the summer of 1985 still hung faint in the ear when Gooden, the pitching prodigy who had shaken that grimy, hulking horseshoe on Flushing Bay like nobody else since the Beatles, drove across Tampa to his cousin’s house to smoke some weed. It was three months since he had thrown his last pitch of '85 and two months since he turned 21. When



Gooden arrived, his cousin told him he didn't have any pot but he would score some for him. "Be right back," he said.

Gooden poured himself a shot of vodka. He walked around the house. He opened a bedroom door and found two half-naked women making out on a bed. They invited him in, and Gooden took a seat on a chair and watched.

The women had cocaine. Would Gooden like to share it with them? Gooden declined. His drinking had picked up during the '85 season, but he had never tried coke. Soon he joined them on the bed. The three of them downed shots of vodka.

The women brought out more coke, spreading it in neat lines over a mirror. This time the freshly minted Cy Young Award winner thought, *What the hell, we're just having fun here.* He snorted a line. "At first I thought it was the finest feeling I ever had," Gooden says, "though it was a false feeling. The first time I tried cocaine . . . the best way to say it is this: It was the worst mistake of my life, at [21] years old.

"People ask me all the time: If my career started in a place like Kansas City instead of New York, would I have the same problems? My answer is yes. My problems started in Tampa. And one of the triggers is women. Women always played a part.

"When the relapses came, it was a double-edged sword. If I was down or depressed and suffering from

"It was almost
surreal, like an out-
of-body experience,"
Gooden says.

**"EVERY GAME,
I FELT TOTALLY
IN CONTROL."**

self-pity, I was very vulnerable. And if things were happening great, I was vulnerable too."

IN 1985, Gooden threw a baseball the way an Acapulco cliff diver moved through space. The beauty and fluidity of his body concealed the danger and speed. Tuck, coil, uncoil, thrust and retuck. Had there been a pool waiting at the end of his delivery, Gooden would have pierced the surface with just the hint of a splash.

He began his motion by lifting his hands head-high and his left knee as high as his armpit, tucking it inside his left elbow. In this tuck position Gooden coiled, as if loading a spring. Then, as the leg began to kick out, his left hip drove toward home plate, and only then did he pull the ball out of his glove with a long, syrupy arm swing—down, up and through. His arm and hand moved so fast that his hand passed behind him, close to his body, with a bend at the elbow. The retuck. It was perfect form for the deceleration of the arm and shoulder, reminiscent of Nolan Ryan.

Cocaine, diet, age, injuries, the development of a pitch-count-reducing two-seam fastball to complement his fastball and curve—all of them conspired to wreck Gooden's ethereal flow. After 1985 he became a

knockoff of himself: Gooden trying to do Gooden. Pitching became laborious, especially on the night in '86 when he left the mound without getting an out in the fifth inning of Game 5 of the World Series against the Red Sox. Gooden's worn, worried face was slathered in sweat on a cool fall night. Four nights later, in the clubhouse after the Mets won the World Series, Gooden phoned his dealer and said he was on his way to the public housing projects. Gooden got so hammered on coke and booze that he missed the next day's ticker-tape parade in the Canyon of Heroes. It was only nine months after that first hit at his cousin's house.

"In '84 and '86 I had the same mentality, the same drive," Gooden says, "and I could put maybe four out of six pitches exactly where I wanted. In '85 it was every pitch. I'm not saying it was easy. It wasn't. I was totally focused, like Jordan totally locked in hitting his jumpers."

In 1985 we had no idea we were looking at the apotheosis of a pitcher at age 20. He never would be as good as he was that year, but how many pitchers in baseball history were ever that good?

"Nineteen eighty-five was the year I got to say I played behind Dwight Gooden," says former Mets first baseman Keith Hernandez. "I never got to play behind Bob Gibson or Sandy Koufax, but this was the equivalent. If he didn't strike out 10 batters, we would joke, Hey, what's wrong?"

Gooden had made his major league debut in Houston the previous year, at 19. He was so young and anxious that many hours before that night game he walked from the team hotel to the Astrodome and, finding it closed, hopped a fence to get in. Gooden would win 17 games and set a rookie record with a league-leading 276 strikeouts (which would remain his career high). He was named NL Rookie of the Year.

Going into spring training in 1985, "I felt like I truly belonged," Gooden says. "And I knew the league was going to be up for me." He had a new catcher: All-Star and future Hall of Famer Gary Carter, the Kid, then 31

and in his prime. “Throwing to Gary was awesome,” Gooden says. “He was so competitive. He didn’t care if we were up 10–0. If I was messing around even a little bit with one pitch, he would say something. He wanted to dominate.”

After 10 starts Gooden was 6–3 with a 1.89 ERA. In his three defeats he was removed after seven innings down 2–0, after eight innings down 2–0 and after seven innings down 3–1. In the final 129 days of the 1985 season, he went 18–1 with a 1.39 ERA in 200% innings. The run began on May 30, when he beat the Giants 2–1, with 14 strikeouts.

The next day a bombshell hit: Seven men were indicted by a federal grand jury in Pittsburgh on drug charges, principally for providing cocaine to major leaguers, none of whom were yet named.

BEFORE THERE was Gooden, there was Fernando Valenzuela. In 1981, a strike-shortened season, the Dodgers’ lefthander won the Cy Young and Rookie of the Year awards at 20. Gooden, then at Hillsborough High in Tampa, loved Valenzuela’s style and success.

As a rookie in 1984, Gooden matched up against Valenzuela twice. He beat him both times with complete games. On May 25, 1985, however, Valenzuela and the Dodgers handed Gooden a rare loss at Shea Stadium, 6–2, in which Gooden left after seven innings trailing 3–1.

A rematch took place on June 4 at Dodger Stadium in front of 49,386 fans. Gooden entered with a 1.79 ERA, Valenzuela with a 1.85. The stars delivered. The score was tied at one entering the bottom of the eighth, when Los Angeles loaded the bases with no outs on two hits and an intentional walk. Gooden knew that one run would likely mean defeat. What happened next was legendary. Gooden ended the inning with nine pitches—all fastballs and all strikes.

Gooden was clocked at 94 mph in that inning, though today’s more advanced radar gun probably would have measured his fastball at about 99 mph. Twice during the nine-pitch sequence Carter called for curveballs—Gooden’s Uncle Charlie was so good it was known as Lord Charles—only to have the kid shake him off each time.

Valenzuela coughed up three runs in the top of the ninth. Gooden knocked him out with his third hit of the game, an RBI single. Naturally, Gooden went back out for the ninth. He finished with 12 strikeouts.

The Mets had grown accustomed to his greatness. “I used to get goose bumps,” manager Davey Johnson said after the game, “but not anymore. Dwight’s like a security blanket for me.”

NEW YORK was a Mets town in 1985. For the second straight year, the Mets drew more fans than the Yankees: 2.7 million, an almost unheard-of 50% jump from the previous season. Gooden was the biggest drawing card of all.

In the 63 dates at Shea that Gooden didn’t pitch, the Mets averaged 32,384 fans. In the 18 home games he started, attendance spiked 24%, to 40,076. Gooden, while being paid \$450,000, was worth an extra 138,459 fans by himself.

Those faithful to Gooden were led by a recent Seton Hall graduate named Dennis Scalzitti, who the previous year, with his friend Leo Avolio, started the K Korner in the upper deck near the leftfield foul pole. (Another friend, Bob Belle, replaced Avolio in 1985.) The guys hung white placards with a

red K for each of Gooden’s strikeouts. They articulated their own definition of Gooden’s greatness with the number of K cards they brought to each game: 27.

After every start, before he spoke to the press, Gooden would call his father, Dan. “My dad, not that he was critical, always found something for me to work on,” Gooden says. “Like that game against



HAIL-FELLOW-WELL-METS

When Gooden pitched, not only did the Mets usually win, but Shea was also packed, and the Apple became, for a bit, an Amazins town.

Fernando. ‘Great game, Son, now between starts you can work on this. . . .’ Later I realized he didn’t want me to settle for the success I was having.”

On Aug. 20, 1985, Dan Gooden called his son before the game. He had a request. Says Dwight, “I have three brothers—one passed away—who are my dad’s sons and a lot older. They were in San Jose. So we’re playing the Giants, and [my dad] says, ‘Give me 16 K’s tonight.’ I said, ‘O.K., you got it.’” That night Gooden, number 16, struck out 16 in a seven-hit shutout. Five days later he beat the Padres for his 20th win—younger by 27 days than Bob Feller was when he won his 20th in 1939.

“I’d rather have his future than my past,” said Sandy Koufax.

One notable person, though, didn't share enough in all the excitement Gooden created: Dwight Gooden. "I don't think I enjoyed it as much as I should have," he says. "I was so locked in from start to start that I wasn't truly aware of what was going on. It was draining. When I pitched well, I immediately started to think about having to do it the next game."



THE METS began September two games behind the Cardinals in the NL East despite having the third-best record in baseball (76–52). Back then only division winners advanced to the playoffs. The Mets' plan to catch St. Louis was simple: Lean even more heavily on Gooden.

He threw 53 innings in September (the baseball "month" includes regular-season innings in October). Since then, no one as young as Gooden has worked that much in September. The load pushed his season total to 276⅓ innings—more than any pitcher that young in the live-ball era (since 1920) except Feller in '38 and '39 and Bert Blyleven in '71. Yet Gooden was at his best so deep into the grinding season. He allowed only two earned runs the entire month, going 4–0 in six starts with a 0.34 ERA.

Gooden's month began with his third matchup of the season against Valenzuela, the second at Dodger Stadium. Again, neither ace gave ground. The game

was scoreless through nine innings. In the 10th, with a runner at first and one out, Johnson sent Hernandez to pinch-hit for Gooden, who had struck out 10 batters and walked none.

Hernandez had not started the game because earlier in the day he had given dramatic testimony in Pittsburgh at the federal drug trials. Hernandez, who testified under immunity, said he began using "massive" amounts of cocaine in 1980 and developed "an insatiable desire for more." He

admitted he played under the influence of coke as a Cardinal but gave up the drug just before his trade to the Mets in June 1983. Hernandez said he quit because he was petrified after he lost 10 pounds, awakened one morning with his nose bleeding and suffered the shakes. "I consider cocaine the devil on this earth," Hernandez testified.

Said Koufax of
Gooden in '85,
"I'D RATHER
HAVE HIS
FUTURE THAN
MY PAST."

Fresh off the witness stand, Hernandez grounded into a double play. The game remained scoreless. Valenzuela pitched 11 innings, and the Mets won in 13, 2–0. "It's a game I'll remember as long as I live," Gooden said afterward.

New York took over first place from the Cardinals on Sept. 10. Gooden pitched the next night against St. Louis ace John Tudor. Gooden threw nine scoreless innings, but for his second straight start the Mets didn't score. They lost 1–0 and were tied with the Cardinals with 25 games to play.

GOODEN HATED Wrigley Field. The mound was too flat. The wind affected his curveball. And he loathed day games. "I was the type who was always up until one, two in the morning," Gooden says. But there was something about day games in Chicago that he did love: They enabled him to eat at his favorite Japanese steak house, Ron of Japan. Gooden was a trencherman. At the steak house he would order the deluxe dinner—"Steak, lobster, shrimp, fried rice, soup, salad, extra shrimp, vegetables," he says—and then eat another one in the same sitting.

The afternoon of Sept. 26, 1985, was damp, cold and windy. Only 11,091 people showed up at Wrigley. Gooden struggled. He pitched with 11 runners on base—but he permitted none of them to score. He threw his fifth complete-game win against the Cubs that year. "He labored a little," Johnson said, "but how can you have a bad game when you don't give up any runs? You've seen him get in traps many times. But he's not really in trouble. He just has to throw a few more pitches."

When the Mets arrived in St. Louis for a three-game series that began on Oct. 1, the Cardinals, riding a 15–3 run, held a three-game lead with six to play. Johnson lined up Ron Darling, Gooden and Rick Aguilera to start the three games. When St. Louis manager Whitey Herzog saw Johnson's plans, he switched his ace, Tudor, to the first game instead of the second. The Cardinals still lost the opener 1–0.

Gooden had thrown 48 consecutive innings without giving up

an earned run. The streak ended at 49, but he pitched one of his most gallant games of the year. St. Louis put 14 runners on base; Gooden permitted only two of them to score. Johnson let Gooden start the ninth with a 5-1 lead and left him in when, with two outs and the bases empty, the next four Cardinals all reached base. The score was 5-2, the bases were loaded and Tommy Herr was at bat, but still Johnson stayed with Gooden. Herr smashed a line drive that second baseman Wally Backman snared for the final out. Gooden had thrown 136 pitches.

The Mets were one game out with four to play. The Cardinals, though, rebounded the next night to win 4-3. St. Louis clinched the division two days later. New York was eliminated despite 98 wins, 24 of them by Gooden. "Nice going," Backman joked to Gooden. "You lost four games. We would have been in the playoffs if it wasn't for your four losses."

DWIGHT GOODEN is 50 years old. He lives on Long Island. He has seven children ranging in age from five to 29. He has three grandchildren, one of whom is older than his youngest child. He earns a modest living making public appearances.

"I'm a little worried about Doc," says a former Mets teammate. "Lately he's been blowing off appearances." Gooden says he is sober but is being treated for depression.

"Back in December my mom had a massive heart attack, and I went through a massive depression," he says. "They gave her three months to live. At the time it was almost like what my dad went through all over again, hooked up to machines."

Dan Gooden died in 1997 at 69 after years of heart and kidney problems.

"It was horrible," Gooden says of his mother's illness. "I started feeling vulnerable. I felt like drinking and taking drugs. I went back to therapy. She's doing better now. She's 84. She's a warrior."

Asked how he is doing, Gooden replies, "O.K. I'm still medicated. If I miss a day, I still occasionally get down and depressed for no reason. My brain is like chemically dependent. Now I've got to commit to taking [medication] for the rest of my life."

Gooden pitched until he was 35. He finished his career in 2000 with a record of 194-112. On the '06 Hall of Fame ballot he received 3.3% of the vote—below the 5% threshold to remain eligible. Three months after the vote was announced, Gooden reported to Gainesville (Fla.) Correctional Institute to serve one year and one day for using cocaine in violation of his probation. He would be released after serving seven months.

"When I went in," he says, "I didn't think I would come out. I thought I would be killed or die in there. Then I began to think, if I can make it out of here, my life will change for the better. I had a long look back on my career. I used to beat myself up about it. Once I retired, every time I



One more thing,
Gooden Says.

**"I DON'T WANT
ANYBODY
TO BREAK MY
RECORDS."**

FLAMING OUT

Three months after his Cy Young season, Gooden first tried cocaine, beginning a downward spiral that wouldn't end until he went to jail.

got in trouble it seemed to be in March. I wouldn't understand that—that's when baseball was starting—but my career was based on what other people thought it should be.

"Of course I think about that [decision to use cocaine]. I feel like my career was cut short because of it. But in jail I came to realize, why should I beat myself up about things that didn't happen when I had so much good that did happen? Today I can honestly say I don't beat myself up, no."

Nineteen eighty-five is forever his personal property, the way 1968 is Bob Gibson's. Gibson's 1.12 ERA in '68 and Gooden's 1.53 ERA in '85 are the two lowest in the 95 years of the live-ball era. Gibson walked 62 batters and struck out 268 in '68; Gooden walked 69 and also struck out 268 in '85.

Wherever Gooden goes people remind him of 1985. Shea Stadium may be gone, but the joy and wonder that welled within its walls still echo. They echo in the memories of those who saw Gooden when he was the main attraction, and in the acquired knowledge of those who know his greatness only from their parents' stories or from YouTube clips. Each carrier of oral history has a favorite story from the year a 20-year-old with just two pitches grinded through the most exquisite 276 innings in the five decades since the mound was lowered.

"One more thing," Gooden says. "I don't want anybody to break my records. Ninety-five percent of the guys who say, 'I don't care. Records are made to be broken,' they're just saying it because they think it's the right thing to say. They don't really mean it. I'll be honest with you: I don't want anybody to break mine." □

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED & PANOLY PODCAST NETWORK

PRESENTED BY
FanDuel *SeatGeek*

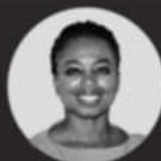
Get more on the latest news and the hottest topics from around the sports world with the new Sports Illustrated Podcast Network.



Featured Guests:



Tim Howard



Jemele Hill



Matt Forte



Billie Jean King



Toni Collins

Each week Sports Illustrated will broadcast a series of free audio shows on your favorite sports, including the NFL, MLB, college football, soccer, tennis and golf.

Go to si.com/podcasts to see the full lineup.



Innocent Until Proven Innocent

→ BY MICHAEL ROSENBERG

LAST WEEK I co-authored an SI story about why NFL teams don't trust the Patriots. A number of New England fans concluded that the rest of the league is paranoid, the world is just out to get their team, then they defiantly swigged their Samuel Adams Irony Ale.

Patriots fans are not alone, though it may appear that way at parties sometimes. Americans believe that their politicians are corrupt and their coaches are honest. I'm not sure what this says about Americans, but if you have an opinion, keep it down. The rest of us are trying to watch TV.

Fans everywhere believe in the integrity of people they have never met, simply because they wear shirts with the same logos. When people accuse our teams of wrongdoing, we strongly believe in the principle of innocent until proven innocent.

It is *inconceivable* that a hypercompetitive coach would bend a rule to win a game if that coach happens to work in our city (though if that coach is losing too much, we should fire the dirty bastard). But if that hypercompetitive coach happens to toil in another city, especially a city that is in close proximity to ours but has its own teams and is therefore despicable, then the hypercompetitive coach is obviously cheating.

When it comes to accusations of unfair play, we stretch like Gumby to put a new twist on NIMBY: Not In My Backyard. No rationalization is too far-fetched, no defense too silly.

You see this, most notably, among fans of college sports, where cheating is more common and the bond between fan and team is strongest. If you showed the average college football fan a video of his team's head coach giving \$100,000 to a recruit, the fan would spend an hour explaining: "The youngster was obviously raising money for charity, and it just shows what great people our coaches are, and the rules are stupid, and other schools do so much worse, and this is all fueled by jealous people at Auburn, UCLA, Ohio State, Florida, Oklahoma, Georgia, Missouri, Washington State, the NCAA, the federal government, the University of Phoenix and France, and anyway, why are you still talking about this? It happened an hour ago!"

Worries
about
cheating
and doubts
about
character
fade
as we
get closer
to our
favorite
teams.
We will
not be
convicted
by a jury of
ourselves.


What team or school has the haughtiest fans?
Join the discussion on Twitter by using **#SIPointAfter** and following **@Rosenberg_Mike**

Why do we do this? The fundamental answer is that as soon as we buy our season tickets we have literally and figuratively invested in our teams. When we cheer, we are part of the game. When our team wins, we win. When we decorate the basement with memorabilia, the team is part of us. And so, when you accuse my team of cheating, you are accusing me.

Sure, in the abstract we understand that everybody is flawed. We understand that the most ambitious people are also, logically, the most likely to cut a corner. But our doubts about human character fade as we get closer to home. We will not be convicted by a jury of ourselves. Fans are not the only ones who think this way. Roger Goodell continues to poll well in Roger Goodell's house.

We spend a lot of time watching sports, and it's hard to stomach the idea that one minute of any success we enjoy might be fraudulent. To justify the purity of competition in our minds, we make leaps that would leave Olympic long jumpers envious:

My alma mater has a high ranking in U.S. News and World Report, so we couldn't possibly have an academic scandal. If steroids help you hit home runs, why aren't professional wrestlers in the major leagues? Lance Armstrong beat cancer, so he couldn't be doping.

Sports are a reflection of society, and we like to stare into the mirror and declare that we look good. Otherwise, what's the point of looking?

Even actual judges stop judging when they watch sports. Earl Warren, former Chief Justice of the United States, once said, "I always turn to the sports section first. The sports page records people's accomplishments; the front page has nothing but man's failures." Sometimes the sections get mixed up. I blame the printer. □



SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (ISSN 0038-822X) is published weekly, with an extra issue in February and skipped issues in January, February, April and July, by Time Inc. Principal Office: Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020-1993. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40110178. Return undeliverable Canada addresses through the UPM process: GST #R66981621RT001. U.S. Subscriptions: \$65 for one year. SUBSCRIBERS: If the postal service alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. Your bank may provide updates to the card information we have on file. You may opt out of this service at any time. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS. See DIMM 7074.12.5. NON-POSTAL and MILITARY FACILITIES: send address corrections to Post Office Box 62121, Tampa, FL 33662-2121. MAILING LIST: We make a portion of our mailing list available to reputable firms. If you would prefer that we not include your name, please call or write us. ©2015 TIME INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED. SPORTS ILLUSTRATED IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF TIME INC. CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS: For 24/7 service, please use our website: www.SI.com/customerservice You can also call 1-800-528-5000 or write to SI at P.O. Box 62120, Tampa, FL 33662-2120.



ENTER THE CODE
RUN THE ROUTE

1ABJK
78KLQ

SWEAT
WITH THE BEST

**YOU COULD WIN AN
EPIC ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE**

ENTER YOUR ACCESS CODE FROM SPECIALLY MARKED BOTTLES AT SWEATWITHTHEBEST.COM

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY. A PURCHASE WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR CHANCE OF WINNING. Open only to residents of the US, including Guam, Puerto Rico, and US Virgin Islands, 13+ 50 Random Drawing Prizes: Sports-related experience. ARV of Random Drawing Prizes: \$2,000-9,000. Ends 11:59 p.m. ET on 3/31/16. Limit 5 plays per person/email address per day. For free code, send a 3"x5" card with your complete name, address & email address for receipt by 3/24/16 to: Gatorade Free Code, P.O. Box 760017, Dept. 838-703, El Paso, TX 88576-0017. Code will be emailed. Limit 1 request per envelope. Multiple drawing dates/entry deadlines apply for Random Drawing Prizes. See Official Rules at www.sweatwiththebest.com for drawing schedule & complete details. Void where prohibited. Sponsor: The Gatorade Company, 555 W. Monroe St., Chicago, IL 60661. ©2015 S-V, Inc. GATORADE and the G BOLT Design are registered trademarks of S-V, Inc. The NFL Entities (as defined in the Official Rules) have not offered or sponsored this sweepstakes in any way.





YOU MIGHT NOT NEED IT.

BUT CAN YOU LIVE WITHOUT IT?

zoom-zoom

2016 MAZDA MX-5 MIATA | DRIVING MATTERS™

